

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2012 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 17–18 MAY 2012 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ presided. The officers present were Second Vice President Margaret W. Ferguson and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Barbara K. Altmann, Jonathan Arac, Lawrence I. Buell, Debra Ann Castillo, Jennifer Crewe, Dorothea Heitsch, Richard M. Ohmann, and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan. María Herrera-Sobek, Marianne Hirsch, Lanisa Kitchiner, Lutz Koepnick, Karin C. Ryding, and Kathleen Woodward were absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Associate Executive Director and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

In the morning on 17 May, following a meeting of the council's Compensation and Benefits Committee, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. In the afternoon, the council continued to work through its agenda during two regular sessions. Time was set aside during the last regular session for a discussion of possible changes to the four strategic-planning groups that the council established in 2011 (see item 5, below). On 18 May, the council first met in executive session for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and to the working environment at the MLA headquarters office and for the annual review of the executive director. Following the executive session, the council's strategic-planning groups held brief meetings, after which the full council reconvened to hear the reports of the group leaders. After lunch, the council convened briefly in executive session and then held a final regular session. The council adjourned at 2:15 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The Finance Committee presented a midyear report on finances with a summary of association income and expenses in the fiscal year 2011–12 after seven months. The committee projected a deficit in the association's unrestricted fund that was smaller than the deficit projected in October 2011. The decrease in the deficit was attributed to savings on expenses.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2012–13 that projected a deficit of \$209,880 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee projected modest increases in employee costs and in expenses associated with electronic development but stable income in most revenue categories. After completing its review of the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2012–13, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2011–12 accounts.

2. *Approval of the February 2012 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2012 meeting for publication in the October 2012 issue of *PMLA*.

3. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* In April, the organizers of a THATCamp to be held at Northeastern University just before the 2013 MLA convention requested permission to produce a THATCamp logo that will build on the MLA logo for the Boston convention. The council's procedure for making decisions between meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102) was implemented, and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on its electronic discussion list. The council unanimously approved the request, so it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed this decision.

4. *Additional Appointments to the Steering Committee on New Structures for Languages in Higher Education (SCNSL).* The appointees to the SCNSL identified in February included only two members of the seven-member working group that had overseen the council's language consultancy project; the remaining members of the working group were to be invited to serve as consultants to the SCNSL (see Oct. 2012 *PMLA* 1026). Since two other members of the working group, Karin C. Ryding and Lynne Tatlock, were available to continue work on the project and still had important roles to play, Catherine Porter, whom the council appointed to cochair the SCNSL and who had served as chair of the working group, asked that Ryding and Tatlock be appointed to the SCNSL as full members before the final meeting of the working group, which was scheduled for May. Because of the timing of the request and the meeting, Michael Bérubé authorized the appointment of Ryding and Tatlock to the SCNSL for two-year terms (1 July 2012 through 30 June 2014). At the present meeting, the council was asked to ratify these appointments. The council did so.

5. *Strategic-Planning Groups.* The strategic-planning groups that the council set up in February 2011 focused on four areas: graduate education, the association's language agenda, scholarly communication, and academic workforce issues. The work of these groups culminated in the recommendations they made to the council in October 2011 (see May 2012 *PMLA* 690–92). In February 2012, following the recommendations of the group on graduate education and the group on the association's language agenda, the council established the Task Force on Doc-

toral Study in Modern Language and Literature and the joint MLA-ADFL Steering Committee on New Structures for Languages in Higher Education. At the present meeting, council members agreed that these two planning groups were no longer needed, since the new committees would carry on the groups' work. Similarly, the creation of the Office of Scholarly Communication obviated the need for the planning group that covered the same area. The council therefore reconstituted its planning groups. The group considering academic workforce issues will continue but add academic work (e.g., online courses) to its purview, and the council established three new planning groups. The new groups will cover advocacy and coalitions, internationalizing the MLA, and the restructuring of divisions and discussion groups. Because the working group convened by Marianne Hirsch had already begun to discuss the last topic (see Jan. 2012 *PMLA* 156), the council outlined a division of responsibility between Hirsch's working group and the council's planning group: Hirsch's group will focus on intellectual aspects of the restructuring, while the council group will focus on how the restructured entities will function in the MLA. The president assigned each council member to a planning group. The initial meetings of the reconstituted planning groups, which were held on Friday, were brief; the groups focused on the scope of the work they wished to accomplish and on how they would proceed with some tasks before the October council meeting.

6. *Statement on Language Learning and National Policy.* In February, the council charged several of its members with reworking a draft of language that the association and its members could use when lobbying government entities for increased support for language study (see Oct. 2012 *PMLA* 1032). At the present meeting, the council received the revised statement it had asked for, revised it further, and approved it. The copyedited version of the statement, posted at the MLA Web site in June 2012, reads as follows:

**MLA Statement on Language Learning and
United States National Policy**

The MLA regards the learning of languages other than English as vital to an understanding of the world; such learning serves as a portal to the literatures, cultures, historical perspectives, and human experiences that constitute the human record. Pragmatically, we believe in the value of becoming part of a global conversation in which knowledge of English is often not enough, and the security and future of our country depend on accurately understanding other cultures through their linguistic and cultural practices.

We believe this view should be uncontroversial; anyone interested in the long-term vitality and security of the United States should recognize that it will be detrimental for Americans to remain overwhelmingly monolingual and ill informed about other parts of this increasingly interdependent world. We are therefore deeply alarmed by the drastic and disproportionate budget cuts in recent years to programs that fund

advanced language study. We believe that advanced language study is important for the same reasons many policy makers, advisers, and elected officials do: Americans need to be literate about the languages and cultures of the United States' major trading partners, and Americans need to be literate in the so-called strategic languages important to national security. But we note that national policy can be and has been considered in more expansive terms: the Fulbright International Education Exchange Program was created in 1946 explicitly to "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries," and since then 310,000 Fulbright scholars have served as unofficial American ambassadors, practicing person-to-person diplomacy around the globe.

We also believe that language learning should be supported for additional reasons: because there is a wealth of heritage languages spoken in American families and communities, because one learns more about one's native language in the course of learning a foreign language, and because recent research suggests that language learning enhances critical brain functions throughout an individual's life. For all these reasons, the MLA views the study of languages and literatures as central to American education at every level.

7. Comment on New York Public Library Renovation Plans. Prompted by requests he had received from members that the MLA comment on renovation plans announced by the New York Public Library that might adversely affect the library's research mission, Michael Bérubé had drafted a statement, which he asked the council to consider. The council decided how to focus the statement, revised the draft accordingly, and approved the revised statement. The statement the council approved reads as follows:

The Modern Language Association, representing nearly 30,000 scholars of language and literature, wishes to express its concern about proposed renovations to the New York Public Library. The "Central Library Plan" has far-reaching implications not only for the mission and functions of the main 42nd Street building but for the New York Public Library system as a whole—including the branch libraries that are so critical to the intellectual life of the New York metropolitan area. The New York Public Library is one of the world's great research institutions, and our members, particularly independent scholars who do not have the benefit of university affiliation for access to research libraries, have an important stake in maintaining and enhancing the Library's ability to serve as a great research institution for as many people as possible. We therefore urge that the renovations to the New York Public Library serve the needs and interests of all who share this critical sense of its research mission.

[Note: After the council meeting, the statement was reformatted as a letter to Anthony Marx, the president of the

library. After the letter was sent to Marx, it was posted at the MLA Web site.]

8. Revised Charges for the Publications Committee and the Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare; Designation of the Chair of the Publications Committee. The creation of the Office of Scholarly Communication occasioned a staff review of the responsibilities of the two association committees involved in book publication decisions. Because the charges of both committees assigned to the committees policy-making responsibilities that should remain with the Executive Council, the council approved the following revised charges.

The Publications Committee is responsible for assessing prospectuses and approving final manuscripts for book publications; for consulting on policies and priorities for the scholarly communication program; and for assisting with new initiatives in scholarly communication.

The Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare reviews development of New Variorum Shakespeare projects and advises on policies and initiatives for the series.

Because the director of scholarly communication is responsible for carrying out the policies that the council sets for the book publication and scholarly communication programs, it was suggested that the director of scholarly communication be designated chair of the Publications Committee. The staff reported that the incoming chair of the committee, whom the council had appointed in February, supported this change. The council approved the new chair designation.

9. Requests from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA). The CHA forwarded three requests to the council. First, to recognize the increasing importance of digital research tools to the scholarly community, the CHA asked the council to redefine the MLA Prize for a Distinguished Bibliography, a biennial prize that has received few submissions in recent years. The council decided to redefine the prize as the MLA Prize for a Bibliography, Archive, or Digital Project. The editor of a digital project will be required to submit a description of the material added to his or her project within the two-year eligibility period, and a particular digital project will be allowed to compete once every five years.

Second, to encourage members to suggest candidates for honorary membership and honorary fellowship, the CHA asked the council to limit the documentation that members must submit. The council decided that members must submit the following materials when making a suggestion: (a) a statement of 250 to 500 words describing the proposed candidate's contributions and (b) a one-to-two-page list of works and honors or a list of up to five URLs where appropriate descriptions and lists of the proposed candidate's work can be found, or both.

Finally, the CHA asked the council to revise its policy on the naming of finalists and the awarding of honorable

mentions. The policy, which the council established in 1996 (see Oct. 1996 *PMLA* 1214), had not been consistently applied over the years since, and finalists had gradually been replaced by cowinners. The CHA did not want to limit selection committees to a fixed number of honorable mentions or cowinners each year but did want the committees to consider carefully before bestowing honors on multiple entries. The council approved the following policy statement, which sets no numerical limits on either category of honoree: "Prize-selection committees should feel free to recognize and honor works as they see fit, including the awarding of honorable mentions when warranted."

10. *Request concerning the Posting of Committee Documents at the MLA Web Site.* The Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities had prepared three short documents that it wished to post on its page at the MLA Web site. The documents provide overviews of academic freedom, intellectual property, and shared governance. Because committee documents that are posted at the Web site can be read as association

documents, the council was asked to review them and, if the documents raised no concerns, to authorize the staff to post them. The council reviewed the documents and authorized the staff to post the overviews of intellectual property and shared governance. Council members expressed several concerns about the overview of academic freedom, and Michael Bérubé agreed to transmit the council's comments to the committee.

11. *Selection of a Site for the 2018 Annual Convention.* The council selected New York City as the site of the January 2018 convention.

12. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2015: 27–28 February, 14–15 May, and 30–31 October. In addition, because of a scheduling conflict, the council changed the date of its May 2014 meeting from Thursday and Friday, 15–16 May, to Tuesday and Wednesday, 20–21 May.

13. *Committee Appointments.* The council made four committee appointments. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear at the MLA Web site.