

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[*Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2013 meeting.*]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 26–27 OCTOBER 2012 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Michael Bérubé presided. The officers present were First Vice President Marianne Hirsch, 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, María Herrera-Sobek, Lanisa Kitchiner, Lutz Koepnick, Richard M. Ohmann, Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, and Kathleen Woodward. Karin C. Ryding was 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 (26 Oct. only), 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 (26 Oct. only), 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 26 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 24–25 October to review assembly and other association business. Sima N. Godfrey, the chair of the DAOC, introduced the three proposals, one motion and two resolutions, that members had submitted for consideration by the 2013 Delegate Assembly and asked other committee members to elaborate on them. Maria Damon reviewed the motion and its supporting materials and explained the suggestions for revisions that committee members had agreed to pass along to the motion's proposer. Jennifer Wicke reviewed the two resolutions that the DAOC had received. She reported that one resolution would not go forward to the assembly because it had not been properly submitted. The second resolution, like the motion, prompted suggestions for revisions, which Wicke planned to send to the resolution's proposer. Debra Castillo presented the topic that the DAOC had chosen for the open-discussion portion of the assembly's agenda: the role of faculty members in curricular matters, including online initiatives. Castillo said that she, Wicke, and the DAOC member Adelaide M. Russo would identify background reading material on three aspects of this topic—how online initiatives redefine education and knowledge production, the outsourcing of language courses to online venues, and the credentials needed for online teaching. Godfrey summarized the DAOC's other business and concluded the committee's report by announcing that Wicke had been elected chair

of the DAOC for the term 7 January 2013 through 12 January 2014. The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their report. Also present for the joint meeting was MLA Parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council turned to the action items on its agenda. In midafternoon, the council's four planning subcommittees held separate meetings (see item 8, below). At the end of the day, the council reconvened to hear reports from the subcommittee chairs. On 27 October, the council began by holding a brief executive session and then convened in regular session to complete work on the action items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 1:30 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2011–12) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2012–13). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2011–12 fiscal year with a surplus of \$678,520 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee attributed the surplus to significant reductions in association expenses and to *MLA International Bibliography* revenue that was higher than projected.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2012–13, which projected a deficit of \$167,760 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the deficit was lower than projected in May (see Jan. 2013 *PMLA* 246) because the outcome of the 2011–12 fiscal year led the Finance Committee to adjust revenue and expense projections. After reviewing the final budget for the fiscal year 2012–13, the council voted to approve it.

2. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Herbert Lindenberger, professor emeritus of comparative literature and English at Stanford University and a past president of the association, as a trustee of the association's invested funds for the term 2013–15.

3. *Changes in Eligibility Criteria for Graduate Student Travel Grants.* The council approved a proposal from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA), which oversees the implementation of the association's grant programs, to initiate a two-year experiment with relaxing the eligibility criteria for the convention travel grants available to graduate student members. The CHA's proposal involved two steps: allowing graduate students at any level, not just those who are ABD, to apply for a travel grant and limiting eligibility for a grant to once during a student member's graduate school tenure, instead of once in five years. The committee will review the effects of the changes in 2014.

4. *Approval of the May 2012 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2012 meeting for publication in the January 2013 issue of *PMLA*.

5. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* In August, the council was asked to sign on to a letter to President Obama encouraging him to include

funding for foreign language programs in his fiscal year 2014 budget. The letter was circulated to a broad coalition of national, regional, and state language organizations by the executive director of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. 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.

During the discussion of the decision, a council member noted that the letter did not reflect the justifications for language study that the council had put forward in "MLA Statement on Language Learning and United States National Policy," adopted at the May 2012 council meeting (see Jan. 2013 *PMLA* 246–48), and asked about taking steps to add the MLA's humanities-based arguments to the national security concerns that are normally cited as justifications for federal funding of foreign language programs. Rosemary Feal suggested working with the new directors of the Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Humanities Alliance on incorporating the MLA's concerns in future lobbying letters.

6. *Policy on Job Advertisements That Restrict Eligibility to Certain Cohorts of PhD Holders.* The council reviewed the MLA's initial response to job advertisements that specified a range of years in which a candidate's doctorate must have been conferred—that such restrictions were appropriate for applicants to postdoctoral positions but not for applicants to regular jobs. The staff explained that no such advertisements had appeared in the *Job Information List (JIL)*, because staff members had worked with departments to eliminate the restrictive language from submitted ads that had contained it. However, in the absence of an MLA policy against carrying this sort of job announcement in the *JIL*, departments that insisted on keeping the restrictive language would have to be accommodated. Council members agreed that there were many factors at play in the current job market that made the restrictive language unacceptable, and so the council decided to establish a policy whereby the *JIL* will not accept job announcements for entry-level positions that specify when applicants must have received the PhD. It was noted, however, that this policy would not prevent departments from considering the dates of job candidates' PhDs when evaluating applications. Therefore, the council also asked the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities to incorporate into its "Advice to Search Committees and Job Seekers on Entry-Level Faculty Recruitment and Hiring" language about evaluating candidates on their merits, including credentials earned and research and teaching experience gained after conferral of the PhD. The committee is expected to submit a revised document to the council for review in February 2013.

7. *Letter to the City University of New York.* Michael Bérubé reported to the council that he had been asked to comment on the situation of the English department at Queensborough Community College, a branch of the City University of New York (CUNY). The department had been threatened with sanctions for refusing to implement certain aspects of a new curriculum devised for all CUNY colleges. Council members agreed that it was important to address the issue of faculty control of the curriculum and authorized Bérubé to draft a letter to the CUNY administration for the council's review. [Note: After the council meeting, Bérubé circulated a draft letter to the council. After being revised, the letter was sent to CUNY's executive vice chancellor in November 2012.]

8. *Strategic-Planning Subcommittees.* During their meetings, held on Friday, the four strategic-planning subcommittees that the council established in May (see Jan. 2013 *PMLA* 246) discussed the kinds of activities that the association might undertake to address the long-term concerns that each subcommittee had identified.

The subcommittee on workforce issues and academic work (Margaret Ferguson, chair; Lawrence Buell, Debra Castillo, Lanisa Kitchiner, Richard Ohmann) focused on the situation of non-tenure-track and part-time faculty members and what the MLA could do to improve their compensation, benefits, and working conditions. Subcommittee members discussed undertaking a survey on departmental staffing practices and patterns that would be based on a survey done in 2006. The subcommittee also planned to coordinate activities with the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession and to collaborate more closely with other scholarly organizations that work on the same issues (e.g., American Historical Association).

The subcommittee on advocacy and coalitions (Michael Bérubé, chair; Samer Ali, Jennifer Crewe, Mecca Sullivan) identified a number of issues that the MLA is repeatedly asked to comment on (e.g., the closing of academic programs, threats to university presses, the status of ethnic studies programs, the value of a humanities education) and discussed whether and how the association might respond. Subcommittee members agreed that the council should prepare statements of principle that the council could use when it decided that a particular situation warranted a comment from the MLA. Addressing coalitions, the subcommittee recommended keeping track of and exploiting the connections that many council members have with other organizations and also working more closely with the national coalitions to which the MLA belongs (e.g., National Humanities Alliance, Coalition for International Education).

The subcommittee on internationalizing the MLA (Barbara Altmann, chair; María Herrera-Sobek, Kathleen Woodward) discussed using association resources (e.g., the convention, publications) to encourage language and literature teachers and scholars outside North America to join the association. Subcommittee members also discussed holding symposia outside North America to foster

a wider exchange of ideas. The full council discussed possible topics, locations, and dates and asked the subcommittee to generate a plan for a series of three conferences that the council could consider in February.

The subcommittee on the activities of the divisions and discussion groups (Marianne Hirsch, chair; Jonathan Arac, Dorothea Heitsch, Lutz Koepnick) considered two questions: the review process for divisions and discussion groups and the activities that these entities might undertake between conventions. Since the Program Committee is already charged with the periodic review of divisions and discussion groups, the subcommittee planned to focus on review criteria. Turning to activities between conventions, subcommittee members agreed that the launch of *MLA Commons* made feasible new division and discussion group activities that the entities' executive committees could facilitate. The subcommittee will continue to discuss the kinds of projects that the divisions and discussion groups might pursue on *MLA Commons* (e.g., book reviews).

9. *Selection of a Site for the 2015 Annual Convention.* The council selected Vancouver, BC, as the site of the January 2015 convention.

10. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of nine societies: American Association for Italian Studies, Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Margaret Atwood Society, Mark Twain Circle, Renaissance English Text Society, Society for Textual Scholarship, Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, William Carlos Williams Society, and Women in French. The allied status of the John Donne Society, whose review had been deferred for one year (see May 2012 *PMLA* 692), was renewed for six years. The council renewed the allied status of the American Philological Association (APA) for one year. Since the APA will meet in Chicago the week before the 2014 MLA convention, the council asked Rosemary Feal to work with the APA's executive director and APA members in the Chicago area to develop a session for the 2014 MLA convention that would be collaboratively presented by the APA and another MLA-related entity. The council agreed to postpone for one year the reviews of the Simone de Beauvoir Society and the Twentieth-Century Spanish Association of America. The council deferred a decision on a request from the National Communication Association (NCA) for a second one-year postponement of its review and asked Feal to seek additional information from the NCA's executive director.

The council also received the Program Committee's recommendation regarding the status of the Discussion Group on Age Studies. The council granted permanent status to the discussion group.

11. *Annual Reports from Standing Committees.* The council received annual reports from the editor of *PMLA* and from the following standing committees: Publications

Committee, Committee on Scholarly Editions, Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*, Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, and Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks. Council members commented on some of the committees' activities and asked a number of questions, to which staff members responded.

12. *Request from the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession (CSGSP)*. The CSGSP asked the council to comment on a draft of the committee's best-practices document, which aims to improve the institutional circumstances of graduate students in their capacities as students, scholars, teachers, and members of the language and literature profession. Council members reviewed the draft and formulated suggestions for revisions. Michael Bérubé offered to work with Jonathan Arac, Lanisa Kitchiner, and Mecca Sullivan on compiling the council's comments and transmitting them to the CSGSP.

13. *Committee Appointments*. The council made seven appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members at the MLA Web site.

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