Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2018 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 27–28 OCTOBER 2017 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. President Diana Taylor presided. The officers present were First Vice President Anne Ruggles Gere, Second Vice President Simon E. Gikandi, and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present were Emily Apter (28 Oct. only), Angelika Bammer, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Lenora Hanson, Eric Hayot, Margaret R. Higonnet, David Tse-chien Pan, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Evie Shockley, and Vicky Unruh. David Palumbo-Liu and Dana A. Williams were absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Scholarly Communication Angela Gibson, Director of Research David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Outreach Siovahn Walker, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses. Controller Arlene Barnard was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below); Head of Convention Programs Karin L. Bagnall was present for discussions of MLA convention-related business (see items 14 and 15, below).

In the morning on 27 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 25–26 October to review assembly and other association business. The committee's report to the council, which was presented by Shaden M. Tageldin, the chair of the DAOC, dealt in large part with the DAOC's assessment of the preliminary report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy Policies and Procedures (see item 5, below). The DAOC welcomed many of the ad hoc committee's proposed revisions to the association's resolution process and commended the section of the report on the other mechanisms for advocacy available to the membership. The DAOC also raised several questions and concerns about some of the proposed changes to the roles played by the DAOC, the council, and the Delegate Assembly in the resolution process. Tageldin added that the DAOC planned to use the open discussion portion of the assembly's agenda for an extended discussion of the ad hoc committee's report and had identified a number of documents to serve as additional background information. The council asked Tageldin to share the DAOC's assessment with the ad hoc committee, which was expected to present a revised version of its report to the 2018 Delegate Assembly.

Tageldin's report also touched on the DAOC's other business, including matters related to the Elections Committee, the order of the agenda for the 2018 assembly

© 2018 THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.752 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meeting, and the rules that the assembly would be asked to adopt. Tageldin concluded the committee's report by announcing that Cheryl Narumi Naruse had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 8 January 2018 through 6 January 2019. The president thanked the members of the DAOC for their work and brought the joint meeting to an end. In addition to the DAOC chair, DAOC member Michelle Brazier participated in the joint meeting. Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Daniel E. Seabold.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in regular session to begin working through its agenda. After lunch, an executive session was followed by two regular sessions during which the council continued to work through its agenda. In the morning on 28 October, the council convened in two regular sessions for further discussion of and action on agenda items. Between these two sessions, the council held a teleconference with Michael Bérubé, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy Policies and Procedures, to transmit council members' comments on the committee's report (see item 5, below). After lunch, three council breakout groups that were established for this meeting met to discuss projects related to the strategic plan (see item 6, below). After these meetings, the council reconvened in regular session to hear reports from the four groups' chairs and to complete work on the action items on its agenda. After holding a final executive session, the council adjourned at 2:25 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 (2016–17) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2017–18). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2016–17 fiscal year with a deficit of $343,080 in the association's unrestricted and restricted funds, a deficit that was lower than the one projected at the start of the fiscal year. *MLA Handbook* sales, book publications, and membership dues generated less revenue than anticipated, but greater savings on expenses led to the lower deficit.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2017–18, which projected a deficit of $201,380 in the unrestricted and restricted funds, a figure that is much lower than the deficit projected in the tentative budget that the council approved in May (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 1, Jan. 2018, p. 226). The committee explained that the deficit was due to the continuation of a number of development projects that are part of the association's strategic plan, the costs of which would not fully be offset by the projected increase in revenue. After the staff responded to council members' questions, the council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2017–18.

The council also received the independent auditor's report on the MLA's 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA for the 2016 plan year and the auditor's letter to management. The report noted that the two items brought to the association's attention the previous year (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 3, May 2017, p. 741) had been addressed but that the association must continue to be mindful of the timing of contributions to the plan.

The council approved revisions to the MLA Staff Manual that were necessitated by the anticipated January 2018 implementation of a New York State law relating to family leave policy. Because council members thought that the prevailing standard on paid family leave embodied in the law was not very generous, the council asked the staff to investigate whether it would be possible to do more than the law requires.

The council adopted the following resolution relating to financial management. [Note: The president certified the council's action by signing the original document containing the resolution. The document was then stamped with the association's corporate seal.]

> WHEREAS, article 4, section E, of the constitution of the Modern Language Association provides as follows: "The permanent fund of the association and its other endowment funds shall be administered by a board of three trustees, each appointed by the Executive Council for a three-year term, the three terms to be staggered by one year. One of the trustees shall be designated the managing trustee"; and
>
> WHEREAS, Malcolm Smith, Domna Stanton, and Catharine Stimpson have been appointed by the Executive Council as the three trustees with authority to administer the permanent fund of the association and its other endowment funds, and Malcolm Smith has been designated the managing trustee of this committee (the "Permanent Fund Committee");
>
> NOW, THEREFORE, be it
>
> RESOLVED, that, upon the direction to Paula M. Krebs as executive director and Terrence Callaghan as director of administration and finance of any member of the Permanent Fund Committee to effect the purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition of any security or securities held in the permanent fund or any other endowment funds, the executive director and the director of administration and finance be and hereby are authorized and directed to take all such steps and to execute and deliver all such documents as they shall deem necessary or appropriate to effect such purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition; and be it further
>
> RESOLVED, that the president of the MLA be and hereby is authorized and directed to certify this resolution to any third party requiring delivery of same in order to substantiate the proper authority for the disposition of the securities of the permanent fund or any other endowment funds.

The council also adopted a resolution authorizing Paula Krebs and Terrence Callaghan to execute agreements and other documents that are necessary for the conduct of the association's business with Bank of America.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.752 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The council authorized the following staff members to sign nonpayroll checks: Terrence Callaghan, Barbara Chen, Angela Gibson, Paula Krebs, David Laurence, Dennis Looney, and Siovahn Walker. Two signatures are required on checks in amounts over two thousand dollars. The council also authorized Terrence Callaghan and Paula Krebs to sign payroll checks.

2. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Catharine R. Stimpson, dean emerita of the Graduate School of Arts and Science and university professor at New York University and a past president of the association, as a trustee of the association's invested funds for the term 2018–20.

3. *Approval of the May 2017 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2017 meeting for publication in the January 2018 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took one action between its May and October meetings. In accordance with article 5.D of the MLA constitution, the council designated Terrence Callaghan as the staff member who assumes responsibility for the administration of the association in the event of the death or the incapacity of the executive director. When this action was proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, Oct. 2010, p. 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the action on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed action, its advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed this decision.

5. *Preliminary Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy Policies and Procedures.* The ad hoc committee's preliminary report included recommendations for changes to the resolution process designed to preserve the best features of that process, which the committee described as democratic and member-driven, and to remedy the flaws that have appeared over the years, which have led to a decline in membership participation in the process. The committee recommended changing the submission deadline for regular resolutions from 1 October to 1 September, increasing the word limit from 100 words to 200 words, and increasing the number of supporting signatures required for submission from ten to one hundred. The earlier submission deadline would allow the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) to evaluate the claims made in resolutions and work with resolution proposers on possible changes to the resolutions' language. The council's fiduciary review of resolutions would take place in October—before the Delegate Assembly meets, not after—and resolutions that pass this review would be submitted to the membership for comment and then a vote on whether the resolution should be forwarded to the Delegate Assembly for action. The Delegate Assembly's vote on resolutions, which could not be amended on the floor, would be the final step in the revised process. The ad hoc committee noted that this revised process did not accommodate emergency resolutions. Instead, matters that arise after the submission deadline for regular resolutions would be addressed through other advocacy mechanisms, some of which already exist (e.g., motions, requests submitted to the council) and some of which the committee recommended be created (e.g., advocacy training for members, creation of a speakers' bureau).

The council discussed the ad hoc committee's report at length and found the committee's proposals for changes in the resolution process to be workable. During their conversation with Michael Bérubé, the ad hoc committee's chair, council members asked him to revise the report for submission to the Delegate Assembly by clarifying some points and addressing the matters that the DAOC had already shared with the ad hoc committee. Since the proposed changes to the resolution process entailed constitutional amendments, the council also reviewed the anticipated timetable for proposing and processing those amendments.

6. *Proposal Related to the Council's Strategic-Plan Initiatives.* The council breakout group that was working on the Action for Allies initiative proposed that the council establish an Action for Alliances working group whose primary goal would be to develop ways for tenured and tenure-track faculty members to become more involved in issues affecting their part-time and non-tenure-track colleagues. The council agreed to establish the working group for an initial term of three years. It will formally charge the working group and make appointments at a future council meeting.

7. Profession *Publication Model.* The executive director proposed changes to the publication model for *Profession* that would allow the journal to appear more regularly and become more responsive to current professional issues. During the council's discussion, a question was raised about the relation between *Profession* and *PMLA*'s special features. Since the council subcommittee charged with reviewing *PMLA*'s structure (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 226–28) was expected to submit its report to the council in February 2018, the council postponed action on the proposed changes to *Profession* until February.

8. *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 Honors and Awards, 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

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.752 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks.

9. *Review of Standing Committees*. The council subcommittee overseeing the review of the association's standing committees (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 1, Jan. 2018, p. 228, and *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 5, Oct. 2017, p. 1276) reported that it had focused on the association's professional-issues committees and had concluded that these committees' effectiveness would be enhanced if the council encouraged them to pursue projects related to their mandates. Two committees might also explore a larger joint project. The council's committee advisers were asked to discuss possible projects with their committees and to provide any necessary guidance.

10. *Recommendation from the Committee on Information Technology (CIT)*. The council received a memorandum from the CIT in response to the council's request that the committee work with the MLA staff on a proposal for the use of MLA data by campus researchers (see *PMLA*, vol. 130, no. 3, May 2015, pp. 902–04). The CIT recommended that the council establish a temporary task force that would investigate whether and how other scholarly organizations share their data and would help to formulate MLA policies regarding data governance. The council agreed to create the recommended task force since it would meet virtually. The council will formally charge the task force and make appointments at a future council meeting.

11. *Request from the Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession (CDI)*. The CDI requested that the council issue a statement on content warnings and submitted a draft statement for the council's consideration. The council approved a revised version of the draft as an MLA statement, which was copyedited and posted on the MLA Web site on 2 November. The statement appears below.

> In the light of pervasive misinformation about and politicization of the nature and objectives of content warnings in classroom spaces, the MLA would like to clarify the usage of such warnings as a matter of pedagogical accessibility and professional ethics. Used at the discretion of the instructor, content warnings serve as advance notification of difficult material (whether assigned on the syllabus, presented in the classroom itself, or likely to arise during specific discussions, including academic conference sessions). Such notification can enable participants to work effectively with the material. Content warnings should not serve the purpose of avoiding challenging or controversial content. Instead, they should enable participants to appropriately structure their own individual strategy for engagement. Far from censoring material, such notifications should aim to cultivate a deeper interaction with texts and media.

12. *Request from the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession (CSGSP)*. The council reviewed a document the CSGSP had developed, "Guide to Leadership and Service for Graduate Students across Languages and Literatures," and responded in the affirmative to the committee's request to publish the guide on the CSGSP's page at the MLA Web site after it is copyedited. The council's adviser to the committee will also ask the committee about the need for further council intervention in the matters the guide addresses.

13. *Selection of Sites for the 2019 and 2021 International Symposia*. The staff presented detailed information on the six possible host cities that had agreed to be considered as the site of either the 2019 or the 2021 international symposium. The following factors were considered: the availability and cost of transportation to and within the city, the cost and availability of different kinds of space (e.g., hotels, meeting venues), visa requirements and safety, potential interest in the location on the part of participants and attendees, and the size of the local or regional audience. Hoping to build on the success of the 2016 symposium in Düsseldorf before exploring other parts of the world, the council selected Lisbon as the site of the 2019 symposium and Glasgow as the site of the 2021 symposium.

14. *Selection of a Site for the 2022 Annual Convention*. The council selected Washington, DC, as the site of the January 2022 MLA convention.

15. *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 eight societies: American Theatre and Drama Society, American Translators Association, Ezra Pound Society, International Spenser Society, International Virginia Woolf Society, Langston Hughes Society, Margaret Fuller Society, and Pirandello Society of America. The allied status of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, whose review had been deferred for two years, was renewed for five years. The council renewed for three years the allied organization status of the Harold Pinter Society and the International Boethius Society and authorized the Program Committee to transmit concerns about the societies' declining memberships and to suggest ways to reverse this trend. The council did not approve a petition for allied organization status submitted by the Ford Madox Ford Society.

The council also received and approved the Program Committee's recommendation to establish two new convention forums—Southeast Asian and Southeast Asian Diasporic in the category Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies and Pre-14th-Century Chinese in the category Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. The new forums will organize their first sessions for the 2019 convention.

16. *Committee Appointments*. The council made one committee appointment. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear on the MLA Web site.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.752 Published online by Cambridge University Press