

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2010 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 21–22 MAY 2010 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT SIDONIE Smith presided. The officers present were First Vice President Russell A. Berman, Second Vice President Michael Bérubé, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Jonathan Arac, Lawrence I. Buell, Jennifer Crewe, Jane Harper, Dorothea Heitsch, Francis Abiola Irele, George Levine, Richard M. Ohmann, Karin C. Ryding, Lynne Tatlock, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, and Kathleen Woodward. Sara Scott Armengot 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, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications 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, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

On the afternoon of 21 May, following morning meetings of the officers and of the council's Audit Committee and Compensation Committee, the council convened in executive session for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and the working environment at the MLA headquarters office and for the five-year review of the executive director. After the executive session, the council convened briefly in regular session and then met with Jessica Jones Irons, executive director of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), to discuss the NHA's work in Washington, DC, on behalf of the humanities and how that work can benefit colleges and universities. She explained the collaborative relation between the MLA and the NHA and expressed the hope that humanities faculty members would become more involved in advocacy activities. At the end of the afternoon, the council reconvened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. On 22 May, the council convened first in executive session. Following the executive session, the council convened in morning and afternoon regular sessions to complete work on its agenda. Some time was devoted to a discussion of workforce issues and whether the MLA could identify new initiatives that would improve the outlook on jobs in the profession and the situation of non-tenure-track faculty members. The council adjourned at 2:05 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 2009–10 after seven months. The committee projected a deficit in the association's unrestricted fund that was smaller than the deficit projected in October 2009. 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 2010–11 that projected a deficit of \$288,060 in the association's unrestricted fund. The deficit was attributed to a projected decline in revenue that was not quite matched by reductions in expenses. After completing its review of the tentative budget for 2010–11, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated Eisner LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2009–10 accounts.

2. *Working Group on the Dissertation and Doctoral Education.* Sidonie Smith presented to the council a proposal concerning the dissertation and doctoral education. She asked for the council's authorization to convene a small, multidisciplinary working group whose members would discuss new approaches to the doctoral dissertation and identify ways to disseminate information on these new approaches to departments. The council's authorization was needed because money would have to be allocated to cover the working group's expenses for one in-person meeting and several conference calls. The council authorized the funds necessary for Smith to convene a working group. Smith will report to the council on the group's work.

3. *Approval of the February 2010 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2010 meeting for publication in the October 2010 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Revision of Conflict-of-Interest Policy for Committee Members.* The council approved a revision in the association's conflict-of-interest policy for committee members. In addition to covering committee members, the revised policy covers the trustees and any individuals who act as consultants to the trustees or to MLA committees.

5. *Phyllis Franklin Award for Public Advocacy of the Humanities.* The council selected Terry Gross as the recipient of the 2010 Phyllis Franklin Award for Public Advocacy of the Humanities. Gross is co-executive producer and host of *Fresh Air*, a program on the arts and culture that airs on National Public Radio. The award ceremony will be held in New York in conjunction with the October 2010 meeting of the Executive Council.

6. *Statement on Fair Use.* In response to a request from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ), the council approved the following MLA statement on fair use:

The Copyright Act of 1976 seeks to balance the protections of copyright with the advancement of knowledge by setting forth criteria for fair use. Under the doctrine of fair use, someone who does not own the copyright in a work may be entitled to make limited use of the work without permission for purposes "such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching . . . , scholarship,

or research." This limitation on the rights of copyright owners enables teaching and scholarship in modern languages and literatures to flourish. The MLA urges scholars and publishers to exercise their rights under the fair use doctrine. For a detailed description of the factors involved in a fair use analysis, see "Fair Use of Copyrighted Works" in the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, 3rd ed., sec. 2.2.13.

The council instructed the staff to share the statement with the CELJ and to post it at the MLA Web site.

7. *Open Letter to the Governor of Arizona.* The officers presented to the council an open letter to the governor of Arizona that they had drafted in response to recent legislative and policy initiatives in that state. The council revised the letter, authorized the president to send it to the Arizona governor, and authorized the staff to post it at the MLA Web site. The open letter reads as follows:

Dear Governor Brewer,

We write regarding legislative and policy initiatives in the State of Arizona that concern us as teachers and scholars of language and literature. You have recently signed legislation (SB 1070) that may place nonnative speakers of English and speakers of other languages in legal jeopardy. In addition, we understand that the Arizona Department of Education has decided to bar teachers from teaching English if they speak English with an accent. Furthermore, you have signed legislation (HB 2281) critical of ethnic studies curricula.

These actions raise several concerns regarding education and language, topics at the heart of the mission of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA). We urge you to keep the following in mind as the State of Arizona pursues its education policy:

(1) There is no rational basis for making language ability an indicator of an individual's citizenship or residency status. This is especially the case in the United States, where many different languages are spoken on a daily basis. The MLA documents this diversity of language speakers in the United States with its Language Map (http://www.mla.org/map_main), which we urge you to consult. Many native as well as immigrant populations use languages other than English, and English language fluency is, of course, hardly restricted to the United States: a speaker of English is not necessarily a United States citizen or legal resident.

(2) Native and nonnative speakers alike always display considerable variation in accent. This fact holds for speakers of American English—compare accents from the Northeast with those from the Southwest—as well as for speakers of other languages. Indeed, there is no unaccented English. There are only speakers with different accents. It therefore makes little sense to bar individuals from teaching because they "have an accent," since accent is always unavoidable. Efforts to exclude individuals on the basis of accent will likely be arbitrary and discriminatory. The recruitment and retention of effective teachers

should not be impeded by concerns that are irrelevant to the important goal of facilitating student learning.

(3) For several decades, ethnic studies curricula have provided important gateways for students to learn about the diversity of heritages in the United States, a key educational goal of the liberal arts education that is the bedrock of American higher education. The field has developed sophisticated pedagogies that stretch across the humanities and the social sciences, providing significant insights into American history and society. Students in ethnic studies classes gain an appreciation for a wealth of cultural expression in literature and the arts and a recognition of the multiple traditions that have found a home in our nation. Policies that curtail this vision will weaken the quality of education, thereby depriving students of key learning opportunities as they move on to higher education institutions.

Because citizens of the United States speak many different languages in addition to English, because every speaker of every language has an accent, and because ethnic studies is important to contemporary American education, we urge you to work toward reversing the policy decisions we cited at the beginning of this letter.

The MLA would be delighted to cooperate with you to formulate educational and language policies that are based on sound research and scholarship and that reflect the state of the art in contemporary American education.

Sincerely,
Sidonie Smith
President
Modern Language Association of America

8. *Recommendations from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA)*. The CHA forwarded to the council a list of association prizes that showed which prize competitions require that authors be MLA members and which do not. After considering this information, the council decided that the prize award for prizes that do not have

a membership requirement should include a year's membership in the MLA.

The CHA responded to the council's request for advice on the establishment of a prize to recognize scholarship in the field of American Indian literatures (see Jan. 2010 *PMLA* 224). The committee recommended that the council establish a biennial prize covering the field of the literatures of the indigenous peoples of the United States and Canada. Council members questioned this geographic limitation, and two of them drafted a prize description that included a more capacious definition of the field to be covered. Because the council did not have time to review the new description, the council postponed discussion of and action on the new prize until its October meeting.

Finally, the council accepted the CHA's recommendation to convert four annual prizes that receive small numbers of submissions each year into biennial prizes. They are the MLA Prize for Independent Scholars, the MLA Prize in United States Latina/o and Chicana/o Literary and Cultural Studies, the Mildenerger Prize, and the Shaughnessy Prize.

9. *Request concerning Online Book Reviews*. The council received a request from a member that the MLA create an online review of books on modern languages and literatures and literary theory. The council discussed this request at length and identified several questions to explore (e.g., the scope of such a project, how it would be administered, how reviewers would be chosen). The council therefore decided to charge a council subcommittee (Michael Bérubé, chair; Jennifer Crewe; George Levine; Karin Ryding) with investigating the feasibility of a book review project. The subcommittee is to give a preliminary report to the council in October on the issues involved and its thinking.

10. *Council Meeting Schedule*. The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2013: 22–23 February, 17–18 May, and 25–26 October.

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