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2008 Election Results

In the elections conducted last fall, Russell A. Berman (German, Stanford Univ.) was elected second vice president of the association. Berman will serve in that office in 2009 and will become first vice president in 2010. His term as president will begin after the close of the January 2011 convention and will continue through the close of the January 2012 convention.

Jennifer Crewe (Columbia Univ. Press), Karin C. Ryding (Georgetown Univ.), and Kathleen Woodward (Univ. of Washington, Seattle) were elected members of the Executive Council for four-year terms (1 January 2009 through the close of the January 2013 convention). Crewe and Woodward represent the field of English, and Ryding represents a field defined as "other" by the MLA constitution (art. 8.A.5). In terms of membership categories, all are regular members of the association.

Fifty-six new representatives were elected to the Delegate Assembly. Twenty delegates were elected to represent special-interest categories in the assembly, and thirty-six delegates were elected to represent seven geographical regions in the United States and Canada. The names of Delegate Assembly members will appear in the September 2009 *PMLA*.

In addition, eighty-seven members were elected to the division executive committees. Their names will also appear in the September 2009 *PMLA* and on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/danddg).



DAVE BUSH PHOTOGRAPHERS

Mo Yan, speaker at the forum "Mo Yan and the Reemergence of Literary Independence in Post-Mao China."

Winners of MLA Prizes Announced

The winners of eleven annual and five biennial awards given by the MLA were recognized at the 2008 MLA convention in San Francisco. Catherine Porter, then first vice president of the association, announced and presented the prizes at

a ceremony preceding the Presidential Address on 28 December. A complete list of this year's prizewinners appears on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/pdf/08prizewinners.pdf).

The MLA's prizes are awarded under the auspices of the Committee on Honors and Awards, which appoints the members of the selection committee and determines procedures, deadlines, and criteria for eligibility for all prizes. Deadlines for upcoming prizes are located at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/resources/awards/awards_submissions/awards_competitions). To submit books or to obtain detailed information about any of the prizes, call or write the coordinator of book prizes at the MLA office (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org).



MLA vice president Catherine Porter (right) presents the William Sanders Scarborough Prize to Candice M. Jenkins.

DAVE BUSH PHOTOGRAPHERS



Association Matters

Although I am not pessimistic by nature, as I write in December 2008 I see reasons for disquiet ranging from war to global warming and now to an economic crisis that intensifies our shared professional concerns. My colleagues at the State University of New York and throughout the country are girding for yet another struggle to secure adequate funding for public university systems already pared to the bone by decades of budget trimming. In both public and private institutions, searches are being canceled or put on hold: especially in the humanities, the academic marketplace is visibly tightening. College and university endowments continue to plummet, along with retirement portfolios.

Still, the transition in Washington is well under way. While a rapid recovery appears unlikely, there is much talk of investment in infrastructure. Here is where I see some cause for cautious optimism; here is where our disciplines come in—or ought to, if we can make our voices heard. Can we make the case that universities are as crucial as roads and bridges? that investment in undergraduate programs, graduate research, and financial aid at all levels is as essential as investment in pipelines and broadband capacity? that expanded access to affordable postsecondary study of the liberal arts and the humanities will allow us to develop a grounded, nimble workforce able to identify and address the challenges ahead?

In principle the American system of postsecondary education is uniquely equipped to produce such a workforce. Alas, the difficulties we are now facing only exacerbate those the system has been dealing with for decades. In *The Unmaking of the Public University*, Christopher Newfield describes a constellation of factors that have weakened higher education in the United States—and the humanities in particular—over the past half-century. He identifies one of the chief concerns behind his project as “the country’s intellectual and imaginative decline”:

By the early 2000s, the American majority seemed to have lost its vision of a society devoted to the development and happiness of its members. Judging from media discourse, we had come to believe in economic growth and little else, more money and little else. Other aims, particularly coming from other cultures and countries, seemed increasingly mysterious and even threatening to us. Did we still have the cultural capacity to understand, interact, and respond positively to a world of countless motives, one where sheer growth was no longer an environmental option? (14)

Whether or not we subscribe to Newfield’s account of cultural decline, we cannot deny the aptness of his focus on our limited ability to appreciate other cultures. A

rather surprising case in point comes from a recent column by David Brooks in the *New York Times*. Under the title “Continuity We Can Believe In,” Brooks argues that the groundwork for a changed American foreign policy was laid some years ago, as military officers in war zones “realized that the big challenge in this new era is not killing the enemy, it’s repairing the zones of chaos where enemies grow and breed.” He refers to a 2006 speech by Secretary of State Rice calling for “a transformational diplomacy in which State Department employees would . . . be out in towns and villages doing broad campaign planning with military colleagues, strengthening local governments and implementing development projects.”

Now, the nation clearly benefits if it can call on a broad pool of liberally educated, politically savvy, and culturally sensitive citizens who can quickly read and adapt to prevailing conditions and work effectively with their counterparts at home and abroad. As it happens, the foundational disciplines that allow students to develop the cultural capacities Newfield and Brooks suggest we need are precisely the ones for which MLA members have primary responsibility in colleges and universities. We stress careful reading, critical thinking, and effective writing. We introduce works of literature that invite students to empathize with people unlike themselves and to imagine themselves in situations unlike their own. Some of us teach cultural studies, media studies, rhetoric, or linguistics—disciplines in which students are led to look at themselves and their cultural context analytically and from a certain distance. And those of us who teach foreign languages and literatures press students to reflect on the ways in which linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding are inseparably intertwined.

The knowledge and skills and problem-solving abilities our students acquire and hone in our classes are critical resources: for us, this is so obvious that it tends to go without saying. Yet as academics and as teachers of the humanities, we are being asked yet again—by parents, legislators, journalists, “the public”—to defend what we do and the way we do it. For many, the temptation will be to retreat into the institutional territory that we occupy in our daily lives and simply struggle to retain resources for our departments, programs, and academic fields. But if we are organized in a modern language association, it is because members of our profession have long understood the connection between our work and the state of higher education at large. As Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz show in *The Race between Education and Technology*, the

On the MLA Web Site

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[Letters to the Editor](#)



progress of the American system toward producing more well-educated citizens has stagnated since the 1970s, while the rest of the world has been catching up with us. Goldin and Katz link the decline of middle-class living standards and the opening of an alarming income gap between the wealthy and the rest of society to a problem of supply: too few students are achieving the educational level necessary to sustain the socioeconomic progress made during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. This trend correlates with the broad retreat from public investment in higher education that Newfield documents. Reversing it will require collective action by well-organized educators and citizens who are willing to move beyond the confines of academic institutions and press their political leaders to make the cause of reinvestment in education a component of the federal program for restoring social and economic prosperity.

With its more than 30,000 members, the Modern Language Association can be a powerful voice for strengthening the institutions that allow us to do our critical work. The MLA is engaged in ongoing efforts to influence legislative and policy decisions at the state and federal levels. We argue that colleges and universities are a crucial component of the nation's infrastructure and that increased investment in them will expand our "cultural capital" in essential ways. In early March, Rosemary Feal and I will join colleagues representing the full range of humanities disciplines for a day-long advocacy workshop in Washington, followed by a day of lobbying on Capitol Hill. Perhaps some *Newsletter* readers will join us. But there are many paths to advocacy: on their Web sites, both the National Humanities Alliance (www.nhalliance.org/) and the Joint National Committee for Languages–National Council for Languages and International Studies (www.languagepolicy.org/) offer valuable suggestions, and others may emerge from the open discussion scheduled to take place at our convention in San Francisco. I urge you to explore these paths and to continue the discussion, in this forum and elsewhere, in the months ahead.

Catherine Porter

Works Cited

- Brooks, David. "Continuity We Can Believe In." *New York Times* 2 Dec. 2008, late ed.: A33. Print.
- Goldin, Claudia, and Lawrence F. Katz. *The Race between Education and Technology*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008. Print.
- Newfield, Christopher. *The Unmaking of the Public University*. Harvard UP, 2008. Print.

Members are invited to comment on the president's column at www.mla.org/fromthepres.

Delegate Assembly News

At its meeting on 29 December 2008 in San Francisco, the Delegate Assembly took the following actions.

The assembly conducted elections for the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, the Nominating Committee, and the Elections Committee. The names of the new committee members can be found at www.mla.org/governance/committees/comm_gov. Subject to ratification by the membership, Mo Yan was elected an honorary fellow of the association.

The assembly received the report of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), the executive director's report, the Finance Committee's report, and annual reports from the association's standing committees. Delegates had the opportunity to comment on or ask questions about all these reports. In conjunction with its report, the DAOC proposed a motion that called on the Delegate Assembly to

Membership Ratification Vote

In December 2007 the Delegate Assembly approved two constitutional amendments and three resolutions that were submitted to the membership for ratification this past fall. Also subject to ratification by the membership was the assembly's election of an honorary fellow. The results of these membership ratification votes are presented below.

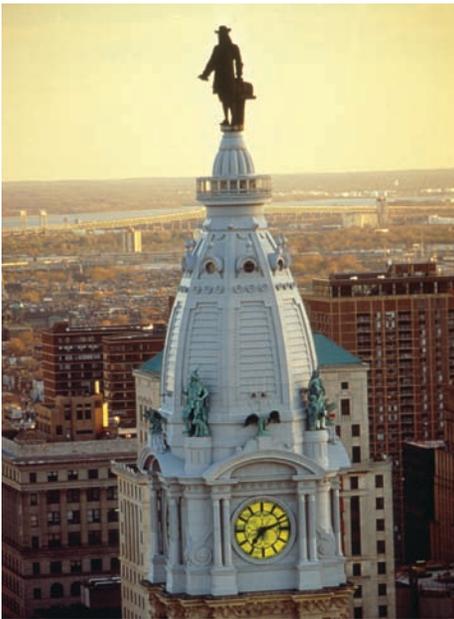
Members ratified the election of Albert Wendt to honorary fellowship in the association. He has been invited to accept the honor. The membership also ratified the constitutional amendments. The first amendment added a new provision (art. 4.D) that allows votes in which the entire MLA membership participates to be conducted by electronic means. The second amendment affected articles 12.A, 12.E, 9.D, 11.C.4, 6.B, 8, and 10.C and provided for changing the dates of the annual convention. The amendments have been incorporated into the constitution; see the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/governance/mla_constitution).

The membership also ratified the three resolutions approved by the 2007 Delegate Assembly. The preamble and text of each can be found at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/governance/mla_resolutions/resolutions_from_the).

charge the DAOC to bring forward a proposal to strengthen the association's resolution process. The assembly approved the DAOC's motion.

In other business, the assembly approved two motions and one resolution submitted by MLA members. The motions will be forwarded to the Executive Council in February, and the council will consider their implementation. The resolution will also be forwarded to the Executive Council in February. Following the provisions of article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution, the council will conduct a review of the constitutional, legal, and fiduciary issues posed by the language of the resolution. If the resolution does not pose any constitutional, legal, or fiduciary problems, the council will forward it to the membership for ratification later this year.

A complete report of the Delegate Assembly meeting will appear in the May 2009 issue of *PMLA*.



Philadelphia City Hall

Department Chairs' Hotel Reservations

In August 2009 the MLA convention office will mail chairs of departments that are paid members of ADE or ADFL by 1 June 2009 early information about making hotel room reservations for the MLA convention. These chairs will also be able to make hotel reservations online through the ADE or ADFL Web site. ADE and ADFL chairs of departments that are participating in the e-mail discussion lists will be notified. This early notification does not guarantee that department chairs will be able to reserve a suite for interviewing job candidates at the convention, but it does give them the best opportunity to do so. Please note that suites may not be reserved through the MLA Web

site. Chairs who would like membership forms or information about their departments' 2008–09 membership status should contact Roy Chustek at the MLA office (646 576-5133; rchustek@mla.org).

Calls for Papers for the 2009 MLA Annual Convention in Philadelphia

The 2009 convention will be held in Philadelphia. Calls for papers appear on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/conv_papers). Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/conv_procedures) and in the September 2008 *PMLA* (pp. 889–94), before writing to the organizers listed in the calls for papers. If not provided, organizers' addresses are available in the members' directory on the MLA Web site and listed in the September 2008 *PMLA*. All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April 2009. Organizers are responsible for responding to all inquiries. A member may participate as speaker or respondent only twice (e.g., by organizing and chairing a meeting, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, panelist, or respondent in one or two sessions) at a convention.

Calls for papers are limited to thirty-five words, including the session title but not the name and address of the organizer.

All requests for audiovisual equipment must be made by the chair of the session and must reach the MLA office by mail or by fax by 5:00 p.m. on 1 April. Because the need for audiovisual equipment is a major factor in the scheduling of meetings (and because the movement of equipment is both costly and hazardous), the deadline is firm. Participants should indicate their audiovisual needs when they respond to a call for papers and should check with the chair of the session or with the MLA convention office to be sure that the necessary equipment has been ordered by 1 April.

Members without Internet access who need a printout of the calls for papers should write or call the MLA office to have a copy mailed to them (membership@mla.org; 646 576-5151).

2009 ADE and ADFL Summer Seminars

Each June, department chairs and directors of graduate study of ADE- and ADFL-member departments assemble at the summer seminars to develop and sustain a community of shared interests and to articulate, in a collective voice, their professional judgment on matters of interest to English and foreign language departments and humanities divisions. Each seminar features a preseminar Workshop for New Chairs, led by seasoned administrators, where those about to start or just completing their first year as department chairs can glean practical advice and have questions answered about any and all aspects of chairing.

ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar East will take place 11–14 June in Providence, Rhode Island, and will be hosted by the Cogut Center for the Humanities at Brown University. ADE Summer Seminar West, to be held 22–25 June in Las Vegas, will be hosted by the English Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. ADFL Summer Seminar West will take place 25–28 June in Tucson, hosted by the University of Arizona.

For more information on the ADE seminars, visit the ADE Web site (www.ade.org) or contact David Laurence, Director, ADE, or Doug Steward, Associate Director, at the MLA office (646 576-5132; ade@mla.org). Further information on the ADFL seminars is available at the ADFL Web site (www.adfl.org) or by contacting Nelly Furman, Director, ADFL, or David Goldberg, Associate Director, at the MLA office (646 576-5132; adfl@mla.org).

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Is This Our *MLA Newsletter*?

Is it? Since I became a member of the MLA over thirty years ago, I've become used to the quarterly arrival of the black-on-cream print issue of the *MLA Newsletter*, a picture of a committee (taken in the office from which I now write) on the front page, and a list of upcoming deadlines on the back. It's always jarring when a familiar publication takes on a new look, so I thought I'd let you know why we've decided to give the *Newsletter* a makeover and how we hope to serve your needs better in the process. If we succeed, then we really will be able to claim the *Newsletter* as ours: a publication that represents us well, gives us information we can use, and serves the purposes for which it was (re)designed.

In an effort to improve the ways we get information to members when they need it, last summer we surveyed members about the *Newsletter*. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that, by and large, members read the *Newsletter* and find the information in it useful. There was general satisfaction with the publication: many of those who responded seemed wary of change (except for refreshing its design). Although many respondents recognized the importance of turning to the Web site to get information in a timely fashion, they also said that they enjoyed the physical copy of the *Newsletter*. They pack it in their totes to take on journeys, or they leave it in their offices for others to read: portability seems key to its utility. Some respondents, however, encouraged us to put environmental issues first and eliminate the paper version altogether. We hope we've struck the right compromise.

Among the features singled out as most interesting to members: information about the annual convention, including calls for papers, procedures and policies, and previews of sessions and other events taking place in the convention city. We also heard that members read the first-person columns (if you're still reading this one, you'd be counted in that group!). The biggest concern with the *Newsletter*, however, had nothing to do with content: it was about getting the publication on time. What good are the calls for papers if they reach you three days before responses are due? I may hear from members in one area of the country that their copy of the *Newsletter* hasn't yet arrived, whereas I know that my personal copy, mailed at the same time, reached me ten days before. Such are the vagaries of the well-named snail mail system.

One thing was clear from the responses to our survey: most respondents want access to information in both print and electronic form. Some members, to be sure, would rather receive all their information through the MLA Web site or through e-mail messages—and we have options for those members. Reading the comments on the wish for an electronic version of the *Newsletter*—which has been in existence since Spring 2001—I found myself thinking that we need to do a better job of letting members know about the availability of this publication on our Web site. What is the purpose of having it electronically if many members don't know how or when to find it? To remedy this problem, when new issues of the *Newsletter* are available online we now send e-mail announcements to those members who have authorized us to send them e-mail. Members can also opt to receive the *Newsletter* in electronic form only.

Other changes that stand out in the redesigned publication: it is shorter, and it includes more references to fuller descriptions of things that can be found on the MLA Web site. We made the decision to move items like deadline reminders and calls for papers to the Web site but to leave a clear reference to them in print. Information can travel faster this way, even if there may be a two-step process involved (read about it in brief in the print *Newsletter*; view it in detail on the Web site). But if you are reading the *Newsletter* online, you are getting the most up-to-date information, and you can click through to the material you want to view in one step. Another reason to go the way of the cursor.

Some other changes: we plan to create a single all-convention issue each fall. Instead of repeating information or splitting it between the Fall and Winter issues, the new format will give you what you need to know in one publication. The columns written by the president and the executive director will still appear in the print format, and the president's column will be featured on the MLA home page, as it is now (see "From the President"). You can comment on the president's column on the Web site, and we are pleased that many of you have chosen to do so since we debuted the feature in 2008. You don't have to wait until the next issue of the *Newsletter* to see the reactions that the president's remarks have generated, and you can continue the conversation initiated by fellow members when you add your own observations.

By shortening the *Newsletter*, we save on paper and postage costs, and we reduce the impact on the environment. We are concerned, though, that members who don't use the Web will feel as if a benefit has been made less accessible. The overview that the new format provides is a promise for more in-depth information on the Web, and for some members we may not be able to fulfill that promise. We invite members with no access to the Web to contact the Member and Customer Services office (646 576-5151) and ask to have a printout of anything that interests them. It's not a perfect solution, of course, but in the digital age, when most scholarly associations use their Web sites as the primary means of communication with members, we think we are heading in the right direction.

Speaking of the Web site, we hope you've noticed that it is opening up to more conversations among members
(cont. on p. 6)

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(cont. from p. 5)

through the online forums for division and discussion groups, the convention blog, the invitation to self-nominate (or nominate others) for committee membership, and so on. Yet the *Newsletter*, in its new, shorter, and colorful incarnation, lets us know that our professional association exists and evolves—and we don't have to click anywhere for the reminder. I find myself wondering whether the redesign of the *Newsletter* will appeal to members, and I hope you'll let us know how we're doing in getting you what you want in a timely way. (I invite you to write to me at execdirector@mla.org; Letters to the Editor will now appear exclusively on the MLA Web site.) And if you find yourself missing the old format, you can always call up archived issues and remember the decades of black on cream.

Rosemary G. Feal

Members may write to the editor at execdirector@mla.org. Writers are asked to limit letters to five hundred words; the editor reserves the right to edit letters that exceed five hundred words. [Letters to the editor appear on the MLA Web site.](#)

Four New MLA Titles Released

- *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context*, by Azade Seyhan
- *An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry from Spain*, edited by Anna-Marie Aldaz and translated by Aldaz and W. Robert Walker
- *Approaches to Teaching Poe's Prose and Poetry*, edited by Tony Magistrale and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock
- *Approaches to Teaching Lazarillo de Tormes and the Picaresque Tradition*, edited by Anne J. Cruz

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/newtitles>.

