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## 2013 Election Results

In the elections conducted last fall, Kwame Anthony Appiah (English, Princeton Univ.) was elected second vice president of the association.

Brian Croxall (English, Emory Univ.), Margaret R. Higonnet (English, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs), and Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting (French, Vanderbilt Univ.) were elected to at-large seats on the Executive Council for four-year terms. In addition, during the 2014 Delegate Assembly meeting in Chicago, an election was held to fill one of the assembly's seats on the council. Gaurav G. Desai (English, Tulane Univ.) was elected for the same term as the other new council members.

Fifty-four new representatives were elected to the Delegate Assembly. Seventeen delegates were elected to represent special-interest categories, and thirty-seven regional delegates were elected. A listing of all members of the Delegate Assembly can be found at the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/del\\_assembly\\_members](http://www.mla.org/del_assembly_members)).

In addition, new members were elected to the division and discussion group executive committees. The listings of executive committee members at the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/danddg](http://www.mla.org/danddg) for the divisions and [www.mla.org/dgroupecomm](http://www.mla.org/dgroupecomm) for the discussion groups) have been updated to include new committee members' names.



Marianne Hirsch delivers the 2014 Presidential Address.

OSCAR ENZIG

## Winners of MLA Prizes Announced

The winners of eight annual and eight biennial awards given by the MLA were recognized at the January 2014 MLA convention in Chicago. Margaret W. Ferguson, then first vice president of the association, announced and presented the prizes at the MLA Awards Ceremony on 11 January. A complete list of this year's prize-winners appears on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/awards\\_winners](http://www.mla.org/awards_winners)).

The MLA's prizes are awarded under the auspices of the Committee on Honors and Awards, which appoints the members of the selection committees 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/awards\\_competitions](http://www.mla.org/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](mailto:awards@mla.org)).



Margaret W. Ferguson presents the William Sanders Scarborough Prize to Erica R. Edwards.

OSCAR ENZIG



GREGORY URUJIAGA / UC DAVIS

## The Common, the Goose, and the MLA

I live in a town in the northern part of California's Central Valley, and I work for the town's biggest employer—a branch of the University of California that was founded as an agricultural extension of UC Berkeley in 1905. My colleagues in this public university's renowned school of agriculture contribute to both sides of a local debate (with global consequences) about the means and ends of farming.

This debate pits small farmers practicing “sustainable” agriculture against Big Agriculture in various complex ways. In grocery stores, classrooms, and lecture halls in Davis (and elsewhere), I have come to see some intriguing connections between current debates about farming and a set

of texts about farmlands produced in England from roughly the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. These texts focus on the practice known as “enclosure,” and they are relevant, I think, to contemporary debates not only about meat, grain, fruit, and vegetable production but also about humanities education as a public good.

The following anonymous seventeenth-century poem protests the enclosure of communally held land:

The law locks up the man or woman  
That steals the goose from off the Common,  
But lets the greater villain loose  
That stole the Common from the goose.

This poem anticipates Simon Fairlie's account of enclosure as “the subdivision and fencing of common land into individual plots which were allocated to those people deemed to have [individual] . . . rights to the land enclosed.” For over five hundred years, English writers of pamphlets, agricultural treatises, legal documents, and works now classified as literary argued about enclosure even as the process of privatization steadily progressed. Fairlie, the editor of the British journal *Land* and a former farmworker who now makes scythes, and books, for his living, sums up the enclosure debate succinctly: “Proponents and ‘beneficiaries’ of enclosure insist[ed] that it was necessary for economic development or ‘improvement,’ and those against (including the dispossessed) claim[ed] that it deprived the poor of their livelihoods and led to rural depopulation.”

What might these debates about the disposition and use of agricultural land in the past tell us about what is going on in higher education in the United States today? Higher education is a mixed sector, private and public, each of which makes its own claims to contribute to a good that is common not because it is equally available to all but because it benefits society as a whole. Both private and public colleges and universities often give scholarships to low-income students, and both types of institution receive various forms of government funding. As state support for public colleges and universities declines, they increasingly seek private subsidies, and both types of institution rely on their wealthier students (and parents) for tuition revenue. The distinction between private and public in higher education is blurring, raising urgent questions about whom institutions of higher education are and should be serving. For some who criticize public colleges and universities for failing to serve the needs of taxpayers, higher education does not look like a public good at all; instead, it looks like a consumer good whose

value is properly determined by the market. From this perspective, public universities and colleges must become more productive, trimming waste and increasing quantifiable output. From another perspective, however, public colleges and universities cannot serve their students, present and future, unless the faculty members are able to work and teach in an environment that allows certain kinds of inefficiency. What seems like a wasteful place to some may be a generative environment for transformative teaching (where outcomes cannot be predicted), for basic research in the sciences, and for scholarly inquiry in the humanities.

The MLA has been and must continue to be an articulate participant in debates about the humanities' claim to preserve and create a distinctive kind of wealth. Our own version of a common, in the form of a Web platform launched in January 2013, *MLA Commons*, allows members to express their views, to collaborate with one another, and to discuss documents produced by the MLA and its members. *MLA Commons* enabled more than a thousand members to comment last fall on a draft proposal for the organizational revision of the association's intellectual structure. *MLA Commons* is not only generating new kinds of communication among members but also fulfilling its legacy as an example of innovative sharing. The City University of New York gave the MLA the software of its *CUNY Academic Commons*; with many changes made by the MLA's talented staff, the software—held in common with no exclusive ownership—will now be passed on to other scholarly organizations.

Further, at the MLA's recent convention in Chicago, there was a Delegate Assembly “open discussion” focused on strategies for strengthening higher education as a “public good.” The discussion, which will continue at next year's convention in a session sponsored by the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, confirmed and extended arguments made by James Grossman, the executive director of the American Historical Society. At the same Chicago convention, the MLA presented the first Chicago Humanities Summit with the Chicago Humanities Festival and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; the plenary session, introduced by the 2013–14 MLA president, Marianne Hirsch, focused on the academy's report on the state of humanities education, *The Heart of the Matter*. Through the Executive Council's new subcommittee on K–16 collaborations, the MLA is exploring new avenues of communication with our humanities colleagues in primary and secondary education, especially but not only with those who have been tasked with implementing the controversial Common Core State Standards.

It seems as if ideas about the common, along with innovative practices enabled by the experiment in a global common called the Web, are everywhere up for discussion: as common endeavor, common core, and common good, among others. The poem I quoted earlier suggests that enclosure of common land in England was a story of winners and losers, despite the claims made by the enclosers for a more efficient agriculture. As humanities educators, we should make it part of our shared task to monitor both past and present claims for the common good and to defend the place of the humanities in any version of the good that can be truly held in common. We must also attend to what is not always considered part of the “humanities” but is covered by any idea of what is humane: the fate of the goose itself.

Margaret W. Ferguson

### Works Cited

- Fairlie, Simon. “A Short History of Enclosure in Britain.” *Land 7* (2009): n. pag. Web. 24 Jan. 2014.
- Grossman, James. “Disrupting the Disruptors.” *Inside Higher Ed*. Inside Higher Ed, 16 Dec. 2013. Web. 24 Jan. 2014.
- The Heart of the Matter*. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Amer. Acad. of Arts and Sciences, 2013. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.

Members are invited to comment on the president’s column at [president.commons.mla.org](http://president.commons.mla.org).

## Delegate Assembly News

At its meeting on 11 January 2014 in Chicago the Delegate Assembly took the following actions.

The assembly conducted elections for the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, the Executive Council, the Nominating Committee, and the Elections Committee. The names of those elected can be found in the relevant committee listing at [www.mla.org/comm\\_gov](http://www.mla.org/comm_gov). The assembly also elected one honorary member and three honorary fellows. The assembly’s election of honorary members and fellows is subject to ratification by the membership. The required ratification vote will be conducted later this year.

The assembly received the report of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), the report of the Executive Council on the implementation of motion 2013-1, 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 these reports.

In other business, the assembly approved two resolutions. They will 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 resolutions. If the resolutions do not pose any constitutional, legal, or fiduciary problems, the council will forward them to the membership for ratification. The membership ratification vote will be conducted later this year.

A complete report of the Delegate Assembly meeting will appear in the May 2014 issue of *PMLA*.



Diane Ravitch speaks at the session “The Common Core State Standards: Their Past, Present, and Future.”

## Membership Ratification Vote

The 2013 Delegate Assembly approved a constitutional amendment and two resolutions that were submitted to the membership for ratification this past fall. All 2013 members were eligible to vote. Of the 27,664 eligible voters, 2,202 (8.0%) returned ballots. Voting results are presented below.

Members ratified the constitutional amendment that the assembly approved. The amendment, to article 3.C, aligns the process for changing the dues structure for life members with the process for changing the dues structure for regular and student members. The vote on the amendment was 1,836 yes and 262 no. The amendment has been incorporated into the text of the constitution on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/mla\\_constitution](http://www.mla.org/mla_constitution)).

Neither of the resolutions approved by the 2013 Delegate Assembly was ratified by the membership. Article 11.C.7 of the MLA constitution states that resolutions “must be ratified by a majority vote in which the number of those voting for ratification equals at least ten percent of the association’s membership.” Of the 27,664 eligible voters, only 1,988 (7.2%) voted yes on the first resolution, which dealt generally with faculty control of the curriculum and specifically with the role of faculty members in the approval of a new general-education curriculum at the City University of New York. One hundred fifteen members voted no. The second resolution, which called on the MLA to endorse the Statement on Gun Violence in America issued by the Association of American Universities in January 2013, received 2,001 yes votes (7.2%) and 143 no votes.

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## Calls for Papers for the 2015 Convention

The 2015 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Vancouver from 8 to 11 January. Information regarding calls for papers for both session organizers and session participants can be found on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_papers](http://www.mla.org/conv_papers)). Calls for papers may be submitted until 21 February 2014 at [www.mla.org/cfp\\_main](http://www.mla.org/cfp_main); calls will not be edited before they appear on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/callsforpapers](http://www.mla.org/callsforpapers)). Program copy forms will be available online by early March and must be submitted by 1 April 2014.

Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_procedures](http://www.mla.org/conv_procedures)), 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 ([www.mla.org/member\\_search](http://www.mla.org/member_search)). All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April 2014. A member may participate as speaker, president, or respondent only twice (e.g., by organizing and chairing a meeting, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, president, or respondent) at a convention.

Organizers are responsible for acknowledging all submissions and responding to all inquiries.

All requests for audiovisual equipment must be made on the appropriate program copy forms and must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. EDT on 1 April 2014. 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 must 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 2014.

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).

## Chairs' Hotel Reservations

In August 2014 the MLA convention office will e-mail information about making hotel room reservations for the MLA convention to chairs of departments that are paid members of ADE or ADFL by 1 June 2014. These chairs will also be able to make hotel reservations online through the ADE or ADFL Web site. Please note that suites may not be reserved through the MLA 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. Chairs who would like membership forms or information about their departments' 2013–14 membership status should contact Roy Chustek at the MLA office (646 576-5133; [rchustek@mla.org](mailto:rchustek@mla.org)).

## Call for Contributions to MLA Volumes

The volumes *Approaches to Teaching the Works of David Foster Wallace*, edited by Stephen J. Burn and Mary K. Holland; *Approaches to Teaching Emerson's Essays and Other Works*, edited by Mark C. Long and Sean Ross Meehan; and *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Eudora Welty*, edited by Mae Miller Claxton and Julia Eichelberger, are now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series. The surveys and calls for essay proposals for these volumes can be found at [www.mla.org/approaches](http://www.mla.org/approaches). The volume *Teaching Representations of the French Revolution*, edited by Julia Douthwaite, Catriona Seth, and Antoinette Sol, is now in development in the MLA Options for Teaching series. The call for essay proposals for this volume can be found at [www.mla.org/options](http://www.mla.org/options).

## Profession Moves Online

*Profession*, the MLA's journal of commentary and research on higher education and the fields of modern languages and literatures as a profession, is now publicly available on *MLA Commons*. The 2013 issue, which included regular submissions, presentations from the 2013 Presidential Forum, and a section from the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, was published in installments in the fall and is now available as a free e-book. Starting this year *Profession* will accept submissions on a rolling basis, and articles selected by the editorial collective will be published throughout the year. The site now features "Common Core Standards: Past, Present, Future," a 2014 convention presentation by Diane Ravitch and responses by the past MLA presidents Gerald Graff and Catharine R. Stimpson. To learn more about submitting to the journal, please visit [profession.commonsmla.org/about](http://profession.commonsmla.org/about).





## Why Was There a Session on Academic Boycotts and a “Right to Enter” Resolution at the MLA Convention?

As many of you know, controversy swirled at the 2014 MLA convention, before, during, and after. I’m still receiving dozens of messages from individuals with no connection to the MLA, some of which contain hate speech, others offering a more reasoned perspective. Only about two dozen members have communicated with me directly about the controversy, but hundreds participated in discussions at the convention, including the open hearings of the Delegate Assembly, the assembly meeting itself, and the session responsible for one part of the controversy.

Although approximately 7,500 convention attendees had a chance to experience more than eight hundred sessions and the Chicago meeting was successful in achieving its intellectual and social goals, one session generated inordinate attention: “[Academic Boycotts: A Conversation about Israel and Palestine](#).” This special session was evaluated by the Program Committee, which accepted about sixty percent of the approximately five hundred special-session proposals it received. At the Program Committee meeting in May 2013 (long before the [American Studies Association](#) met in late November), members discussed the merits of this proposal and determined, using the [committee’s guidelines](#), that the proposer made a cogent argument for the topic, its treatment, and the qualifications of the panelists to achieve the stated objectives. As sometimes happens, the Program Committee, which I, as executive director, chair, made suggestions for revising the session description. The committee wanted attendees to know that the “roundtable is intended to promote discussion of strategy, ethics, and academic work in larger world contexts through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” and that the topic was “how to respond to this boycott or how to evaluate academic boycotts more generally.” The proposer accepted these suggestions, as the description of the session in the Program reflects.

Subsequently, following its November meeting, the [American Studies Association voted to boycott Israeli universities](#), an action that received considerable (and mostly negative) media attention. And that is when the phone calls and e-mail messages started coming in to the MLA. I received warnings of what would transpire if I didn’t cancel the session. I was approached by two individuals representing large outside groups that opposed the MLA session. One person asked me to use my position to call off the session or instead allow people with an “opposing view” to be added to the Program. Another asked for space at the convention so a group could stage a “counterpanel.” I denied both requests, just as I would have for any other topic.

Why? Because the MLA supports the fundamental right of its members to organize convention sessions according to the policies and procedures of the association. Convention programming is member-driven. Not all sessions can please everyone, of course. Some convention attendees will go to a panel and think “Hmm, those presentations I just heard were rather one-sided,” and then they will make their voices heard by offering a pointed comment or ask-

ing a tough question. That’s why we convene: to address issues—sometimes difficult and complicated issues—in scholarship, professional matters, and, yes, public policies that affect scholars, teachers, and students.

Of the hundreds of messages I received, almost all cast aspersions on the MLA just for holding the session that was approved by the Program Committee. One person after another declared that the panelists (and, by extension, the whole association) were motivated by hatred, bias, and a covert intention to promote an association-wide academic boycott. The letter writers invoked academic freedom, which seemed to mean that the MLA must be compelled to present what they thought attendees should hear. That’s certainly not how the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) views academic freedom. Cary Nelson, former president of the AAUP and one of the most outspoken critics of the session’s content, said that the “AAUP’s position on academic events is that they do not have to incorporate opposing points of view. I agree. It is the job of those who disagree with speakers to organize their own events to promote the positions they support” (qtd. in Jaschik).

Think about it: the MLA faced a virulent attack for allowing a conversation to happen. And a conversation it was. The session moderator posed questions to the panelists that challenged their views. Audience members lined up at the microphone to state a range of opinions during the half-hour discussion period. The “countersession” (held independently of the MLA at a hotel near where the MLA session took place) went forward—and was even announced at the MLA session.

An academic conference is a meeting of peers: the structures are overseen by members, and the meeting is intended for them. Members—and only members—can organize sessions. Can nonmembers offer opinions of the work we scholars do? Of course. But should they be allowed to reengineer our convention programming to reflect their views and values? Of course not—nor are MLA members entitled to stage a panel at a conference of another professional membership association, even when they hold strong opinions on issues of vital importance.

Members gave me advice. One suggested I quietly work behind the scenes to create a countersession to the roundtable on academic boycotts. Another encouraged me to find a way to have the Program Committee ensure that sessions of an “activist” nature have a “pro-contra” character in the

*(cont. on p. 6)*

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Dated Material  
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(cont. from p. 5)

future. Although my job would have been a lot easier if both suggested courses of action had been undertaken this year, I refuse to interfere once the Program Committee makes decisions, unless a procedural error is made (for example, if we were to misplace a submission). I believe that our members have the right to have proposals peer-reviewed by the Program Committee without the constraint of having them set apart as “activist” and as thus requiring special measures for balance.

As for the “right to enter” resolution, there are three things to say. One: members in good standing have the right to submit resolutions (see [art. 11.C.3](#) of the MLA constitution), to discuss them (at the convention and on the MLA Web site), and to vote on them. Two: [resolution 2014-1](#), approved by the Delegate Assembly, concerns the right of American academics to enter the West Bank. Please read what it says. Three: the resolution cannot become a statement of the association unless it clears two more hurdles (see [art. 11.C.7](#) of the MLA constitution), including the requirement that “resolutions forwarded to the membership must be ratified by a majority vote in which the number of those voting for ratification equals at least ten percent of the association’s membership.” Despite the conclusions to which numerous outside groups, nonmembers, and even some members have leaped, the MLA membership has *not* yet ratified this resolution. If the resolution passes the Executive Council’s fiduciary review, it will be up to the MLA’s approximately 28,000 members to decide what happens next. The vote of the membership

follows a monthlong period in which any member may post a comment on the members’ section of the MLA Web site. This is a conversation that should happen, and I encourage you to participate in it and to vote on the resolution. Despite majority votes, neither of the two 2013 resolutions cleared the ten-percent bar. Not enough members chose to submit an electronic ballot and have their say. If my in-box is any indication, 2014 is turning out to be quite a different year.

Rosemary G. Feal

**Work Cited**

Jaschik, Scott. “Should Panels Be Balanced?” *Inside Higher Ed*. Inside Higher Ed, 3 Jan. 2014. Web. 21 Jan. 2014.

Members are invited to comment on this column at [execdirector.commonsm्ला.org](http://execdirector.commonsm्ला.org).

The image shows a screenshot of the MLA website. On the left side, there is a list of navigation links: "On the MLA Web Site", "2015 Presidential Theme", "Fellowships and Grants", "Upcoming MLA Deadlines", "Profession", and "MLA Bibliography Fellowships". The main content area on the right features a banner for the "130th MLA Annual Convention Vancouver, 8-11 January 2015" with a logo that says "VANCOUVER 2015". Below the banner, there is text about the convention and a "Related Links" section with various links.