

Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*  
Annual Report for 2010–11

## CHARGE

The Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography (MLAIB)* examines and assesses the direction and philosophy of the *Bibliography*; advises the staff on policies and procedures for compiling and producing the *Bibliography* and on changes in its scope, methods, technology, or form; and aids in identifying and recruiting bibliographers from the academy.

## ANNUAL COMMITTEE MEETING

The committee met on 14–15 October 2010. Barbara Chen, director of Bibliographic Information Services, reported on the status of the *Bibliography*. She discussed marketing of the *Bibliography*, the training of field bibliographers, and production issues.

1. **The director's report.** Chen covered a significant number of areas of interest and concern leading to committee discussions. She discussed the fact that OCLC had dropped all third-party-vendor databases, including the *MLAIB*, and that they had sold their databases to Ebsco, which remains our number one vendor, servicing over fifty percent of our customers. OCLC had been our weakest vendor for sales. Our other two current vendors are ProQuest and Gale. Sales of the *Bibliography* for the year were strong.

Agreements have been signed with three discovery services, including World Cat Local, Summon, and Ebsco Discovery Service. Some technical issues involving these third-party vendors remain. These discovery services search multiple databases simultaneously from a single index, bringing in more resources. A demo of one version of such a search was presented. The ensuing discussion focused on the need for refinement of these technologies and of their effect on the *MLAIB*.

At the MLA's insistence, researchers will always see the notation that they are working within the *MLAIB*. In OCLC World Cat Local, for example, the *MLA International Bibliography* name occurs at the top of each page and in each record. Without branding, the *Bibliography* is not available to vendors.

2. **Elimination of the print *Bibliography*.** The traditional print edition of the *Bibliography* ceased with the publication of the 2009 volumes. The Executive Council made this decision for financial reasons. The print *Bibliography* made very little money. The financial report took only printing and mailing costs into account but not the significant amount of staff time required to produce and process the print volumes. With sales dropping every year, it was inevitable that the MLA would soon incur losses on this

operation. The staff eased the transition to the e-only format for purchasers of the 2008 print volumes by offering to print in segments the classified listings from the 2009 file without subject or author indices. Only thirty members took advantage of the offer for the English and American literature volume. In contrast, over 2,000 members subscribed to one of the five print volumes in 2008.

Eliminating the print version means that the MLA is no longer tied to the print production schedule. Indexing schemes and schedules will likely change.

- A. 2009 statistics showed a drop in coverage numbers due to a shortened production cycle—10 months instead of a full year.
  - B. Indexing will become more current, which is what people want and expect. The 2010 file will close in December in order to allow indexing for 2011 to begin in January.
  - C. Vendors will continue to receive updates 10 times per year.
3. **Indexing schemes are changing.** Because of the elimination of the print volumes, we will no longer need to create redundant strings when indexing a document that would have appeared in multiple volumes. The goal is to keep the classification structure intact by using only one string to describe each document. For example, if an article is comparing English and Spanish literature, instead of creating two strings, the indexer will only need to create a single string, thus eliminating redundant items. The director is writing rules for this process. If the topics within a publication are distinct, two distinct strings will still be needed.

Back issues of journals that may have been missed are being picked up by staff members as time permits. The emphasis is on covering current material.

4. **Adding abstracts.** Abstracts are currently being added. During the summer of 2010, two students typed the 1973 MLA abstracts volume, adding 2,500 abstracts to the retro file. The 1974 and 1975 volumes remain to be digitized. The current file of nearly 30,000 abstracts is being expanded by the inclusion of metadata from other publishers.
5. **Statistics.** We received information on indexing, the number of citations in this year's *Bibliography*, and an overview of the *MALIB*. As of the fall 2010 update, there are now over 2.3 million records in the *Bibliography*. Links to full text articles number over 33,000 on MUSE and over 120,000 on JSTOR. There are now over 29,000 abstracts. DOI's now number over 154,000, and records for ProQuest dissertations number over 62,000. Much of the discussion centered on the recruiting and retention of field bibliographers. The committee made suggestions aimed at improving recruiting in nontraditional areas and on fellowships for training. Conferences were also mentioned as places where successful recruitment might take place.

6. **Old Business.** Statistics for 2009 showed what appeared to be a drop in citations, but this is due to the fact that the indexing of the 2009 volume spanned a ten-month period rather than the usual twelve months. More open-access journals appear every year, and many online Latin American journals disappear after not much more than one year. Many of the journals on Latindex, an online database, focus on engineering, science and medicine.

The advisory committee's 2011 convention session was entitled "Can I Google That?": Graduate Students Speak Out about the *MLA International Bibliography*.

7. **Web site indexing.** Web site indexing is a complex matter because of the proliferation of scholarly Web sites and their rapidly changing nature. Many sites come and go very quickly, and some even reappear later on. We decided to index Web sites, but some requests have been received asking that articles within Web sites be indexed. This reveals some aspects of the problem. Sites must have organizational sponsorship and scholarly content to be indexed. Many unclear areas exist. Other issues include content validity, since anyone can create a Web site, and copyright validity. The complexity of the Web site issue means that further clarification will be needed before definitive answers can be reached, so it is anticipated that the issue will be revisited by the advisory committee in 2011.
8. **Archiving the *Bibliography*.** Since the print version of the *Bibliography* will no longer be produced, the committee discussed recommendations concerning the creation of a safe, permanent copy of all data. Other organizations create back-up files similar to those used by the MLA, but further examination of the issue is needed. The Committee concluded by suggesting that current available protocols for electronic archiving be explored.
9. **MLA guidelines for the inclusion of electronic publications.** The committee agreed that documents can be indexed in either a print or electronic format and agreed to modify the existing guidelines in order to facilitate including about 280 journals that exist in an electronic format only.

## NEW BUSINESS

1. **Changes relating to the cessation of print *Bibliography*.** The print format of the *Bibliography* dictated that certain requirements be followed in indexing and formatting entries. A purely electronic format can accommodate new procedures. Several questions were raised concerning the following points:
- A. Changing to "templates" to get away from existing "volumes" terminology.
  - B. Merge all national literatures into a single template.
  - C. Merge teaching sections into a single template.

Our initial agreement was that these and similar changes would simplify work on the *Bibliography* by eliminating the need for double strings. Questions about new areas in the field of rhetoric and composition led to the suggestion that a three-person subcommittee explore the possibility of a new top term. Contact will be made with CCCC for an opinion.

It is possible that volumes 1 and 2 could be combined since the separate volumes were created somewhat arbitrarily in the first place. The classification of national literatures was seen as valuable for literary studies, and it was recommended that it be retained.

2. **Discussion on scope.** Requests from the field have been received concerning the inclusion of the following fields:

- A. Teaching film and theater
- B. Media education
- C. Ancient Greek and Latin literatures

Most requests are from individuals. No clear consensus emerged from the discussion. Some articles will be indexed by other bibliographies, and some changes would constitute

a clear shift in the scope of the *Bibliography*. Despite an impassioned plea by letter from a noted member of the MLA to include ancient Greek and Latin, there was a reluctance to make such a substantial change for reasons that seem secondary to the main purpose of the *Bibliography*.

3. **Self-published works.** A discussion of self-published works focused on the scholarly quality and content of these works. Technology and a new kind of publisher have facilitated the proliferation of self-published writing. In some cases it is difficult to accurately assess the scholarly merit of various works. The discussion concluded with the suggestion that publications meeting the requirements for inclusion be identified. No specific changes were suggested.
4. **2012 convention session.** The topic chosen by the advisory committee for the 2012 convention in Seattle is “How to Search the *MLA Bibliography* Like an Expert.”
5. **Date for the next committee meeting.** The fall 2011 meeting of the Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography* will be held 31 October to 1 November.

Respectfully submitted,

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