

To: MLA Executive Council and MLA Delegate Assembly

From: Petra Kuppers, Senior Co-chair

Re: Annual Report from the Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, 2010–11

Date: September 9, 2011

Committee charge

The Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession is charged with considering the needs and interests of scholars who have disabilities and with addressing issues of accessibility at the convention and other matters the committee may identify.

Specifically, the committee will provide ongoing advice to the MLA staff about services to be provided to disabled persons at the annual convention. It will encourage awareness of technological innovations and workplace conditions that serve the needs of scholars with disabilities. It will address concerns about professional accessibility and advancement for scholars with disabilities and generally encourage nondiscriminatory practices in the profession.

The committee will also address issues surrounding scholarship in the field of disability studies. In particular, it will assist in a review of how the *MLA International Bibliography* provides access to work in this field and will make recommendations for improvements.

Committee members, 2010–11

Josh Lukin, 2008–11

Helen Deutsch, 2010–13

Ato Quayson, 2009–12

Ellen Samuels, 2009–12

Petra Koppers, 2008–11

Ann Schmiesing, 2009–12; 2010–12 (Coch.)

Sara van den Berg, 2010–13; 2011–13 (Coch.)

Activities

Special Section in *Profession*

2010 brought to fruition a project CDI members worked on for a number of years: a special section in *Profession* on languages of disability. It finally appeared as “Disability and Language” in the 2010 issue of *Profession*. Introduced by Petra Koppers, the section includes essays by Michael Bérubé, Kristen Harmon, and Margaret Price. The committee is now exploring other editorial projects of this nature, including a potential Options for Teaching volume.

MLA *Bibliography*

This year in particular, the CDI has focused on the MLA *Bibliography*'s cataloging on disability and will make recommendations after the 2011 meeting. Members of the committee are accumulating a list of journals and keywords.

Convention Access

As per the committee's charge, the CDI routinely reviews and discusses the provision of services at and the accessibility of the MLA's annual meeting. The committee reviewed all relevant documents and made a number of small amendments. The committee is generally satisfied with the organization's level of awareness of and commitment to creating an accessible and inclusive convention. It will continue its monitoring function and bring access issues up

when relevant. The declining number of requests over the years for ASL interpretation was a concern and will most likely continue to be an issue to be discussed: Why are there so few requests? What keeps Deaf scholars from the MLA? Are CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services a way to go to accommodate other deaf and Deaf-related access pathways?

CDI Convention Sessions

For the Los Angeles convention the CDI organized a range of activities, including three sessions: “21st-Century Performance and Disability,” “Disability Encounters in the Classroom,” and “Disabling Race.” These panels were well attended, and the high-quality papers led to lively discussion. CDI member Petra Koppers also attended the preconvention workshop for job seekers in English and had a number of follow-up conversations with candidates later on in the convention. Having a CDI representative at these meetings is an important way of keeping disability access and presence on the agenda.

For the 2012 convention, the committee is organizing three panels: “Before Normal,” “Frenemies? Medical Humanities and Disability Studies,” and “Disability in the Composition Classroom.” As in 2011, there will also be an informal social event.

Plans for the Future

For future meetings of the committee, CDI members have proposed the following agenda items:

- Investigate CART access for the Presidential Address and for forums
- Create a journal list and tag terms for the *MLA International Bibliography*

- Make sure CDI information is centrally linked from the MLA Web site
- Continue monitoring documents relating to access, job seekers, hiring committees, etc.
- Continue a CDI presence at ADE and ADFL meetings, particularly at their pre-convention workshops for jobseekers
- Investigate further publication opportunities for the CDI, disseminating disability issues across the professional life span widely
- As an internal item, ensure that letters of appointment for new members stress that attendance at annual meetings is understood to be part of the appointment

Petra Koppers completed her term as senior cochair in 2010–11, with Ann Schmiesing as junior cochair. Ann Schmiesing will be the senior cochair for 2011–12, and Sara van den Berg will serve as junior cochair.

Respectfully submitted,

Petra Koppers