

Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities  
Report to the MLA Executive Council  
Erin Mackie  
17 September 2013

Committee's Charge:

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities addresses the general conditions of MLA members' professional lives as teachers and scholars, whether in universities, colleges, or schools, or as independent scholars. The committee is concerned with the rights and responsibilities of scholars and teachers in the fields of language, literature, and writing, specifically the right of academic freedom and the responsibility of ethical conduct toward colleagues and students. The committee monitors activities connected with the recruitment and promotion of faculty members, especially the Job Information Center at the association's annual convention, and receives comments and recommends actions to ensure fairness. The committee is charged with initiating relevant projects and publications but is not empowered to hear individual grievances. In addition, the committee considers the relations among research, teaching, and professional advancement; specific professional concerns, such as the use of adjunct instructors to staff introductory writing and language courses, or the recruitment of minorities into the profession, or the development of strategies for dealing with bigotry and prejudice on campus; and the import of such concerns for questions of philosophy, methodology, and politics in the teaching of language, writing, and literature.

Committee Membership, 2012–13:

Erin Mackie, Syracuse University  
Susan C. Anderson, University of Oregon  
Brenda Bethman, University of Missouri, Kansas City  
Judith Butler, University of California, Berkeley  
Clorinda Donato, California State University, Long Beach  
David B. Downing, Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Patrick Colm Hogan, University of Connecticut, Storrs  
Staff liaisons: Nelly Furman and David Goldberg

2012–13 Activities

The committee engages in two kinds of work: ongoing tasks of oversight and update and special projects elected by the committee. We met once at the MLA office in New York for a two-day meeting in October and conducted the remainder of the year's business through e-mail and conference calls.

This past year we finished up work on a special project begun earlier, creating toolkits on academic freedom, shared governance, and intellectual property. These

toolkits, documents that provide basic introductions to these topics, have now been approved by the Executive Council and posted on the committee's Web page.

Each year we begin our fall meeting with a discussion of "hot topics" on the home campuses of each of our members. We also get updates on MLA initiatives from Executive Director Rosemary Feal and David Laurence, the MLA's director of research. These discussions help us identify topics for the two MLA sessions the committee organizes and give a sense of direction and priority to our endeavors more generally. For the MLA convention in 2014 we are running the following two panels: "The Cost of Program Mergers and Closings" (session 413) and "Who Benefits? Competing Agendas and Ethics in Graduate Education" (session 471).

CAFPRR oversees the following MLA statements, which it reviews and updates: "Advice to Graduate Students"; "Checklist for Job Seekers"; "Advice to Search Committees"; "Dos and Don'ts for MLA Convention Interviews"; "Advice for Authors"; and "Statement on Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members." We also receive information from David Laurence that allows us to carry out our annual revision of the MLA's salary recommendations for both entry-level tenure-track positions and per-course compensation. This past year we devoted the bulk of our time to the documents "Do's and Don'ts for MLA Convention Interviews" and "Advice to Search Committees." Another item under our purview, "Resources on Human Rights Issues" received a lot of attention from Judith Butler and Patrick Colm Hogan, who thoroughly revised and updated the list of resources. Butler suggested, and the committee approved, a prospective document, "Dos and Don'ts for Campus Interviews." The work on this new document is ongoing and, I understand, will continue this coming year.

During the October meeting we read and responded to letters addressed to the committee on issues of academic freedom and professional ethics. As seems usual, these letters focus on problems that emerge during the hiring process. Because they highlight active areas of misunderstanding and questionable practice, these letters help direct our attention when we revise our statements of best practice for job seekers and search committees, as described above.

We met twice more last year telephonically, once in January and again in April. During the January discussion, we finalized arrangements for the two MLA convention panels and got updates from Butler and Hogan on their work on the human rights issues resource list and from Nelly Furman on her work with the authors of essays based on presentations at CAFPRR's 2012 panels, essays that were submitted to the ADE and ADFL bulletins. In April we read and responded to three letters sent to the committee, reviewed changes to the human rights issues resource list, and discussed possible directions for next year's work. We concluded that the committee would like to examine the visibility of CAFPRR's recommendations on *Job Information List* materials, to continue training attention on the issue of academic freedom on campuses around the country, and to find ways of making the topic of academic freedom and resources relevant to it more prominent on the MLA Web site.

As chair, I express our gratitude to Nelly Furman and David Goldberg for their invaluable help throughout the year. They provide the essential institutional memory, prompting, organizational and academic know-how without which our work could not proceed.