

Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession (CDI)

Annual Report, 2012–13

Prepared by Sara van den Berg

Members

Rachel Adams, 2012–15

Susan Jennifer Antebi, 2011–14

Jill Marie Bradbury, 2011–14; 2012–14 (Coch.)

Helen Deutsch, 2010–13

Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 2012–15; 2013–15 (Coch.)

Rebecca Terese Sanchez, 2012–15

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

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.

2012 Meeting

The committee met at MLA headquarters on 13 September 2012 with staff liaisons Terrence Callaghan and Maribeth T. Kraus. CDI members discussed matters related to their charge, including access, programming, and services at the convention. After a discussion about the possible benefits of real-time captioning for some sessions, the committee decided that the MLA's current practice of providing services to meet the specific needs of individual attendees

was working well and was more cost-effective. The committee also discussed the projects that follow in this report.

2013 MLA Convention

The convention was a landmark event for disability studies. Michael Bérubé, the MLA's president, chose Avenues of Access as his presidential theme for the convention. One result was an unprecedented number of papers on all aspects of disability studies—as the central focus of established and special sessions, and as contributions to many other sessions as well. This combination of overt emphases and integration into different sessions testifies to the increasing importance of disability studies in our profession. Bérubé used the occasion of his presidential address to discuss the founding of the CDI and the warm reception the founders received from Phyllis Franklin and other MLA staff members. That support has most definitely continued, both from the staff liaisons and the MLA staff as a whole.

The CDI's contributions to the 2013 convention include the following: (1) Both CDI-sponsored sessions were accepted into the presidential theme listings. (2) A list of sessions and individual papers related to disability studies was compiled and widely distributed. (3) The CDI sent a representative to the job seekers panel. (4) A social gathering was held after the Flying Words Project performance.

2014 MLA Convention Panels

The committee has proposed two panels: “Illness and Disability Memoir as Embodied Knowledge” (session 572) and “The (Dis)Embodied Scholar: Access in Theory and Practice” (session 766), a roundtable that would fuse questions of access with the intellectual dimension of embodiment.

Committee Projects

MLA International Bibliography

In 2011, Barbara Chen invited the committee to suggest a revised set of terms for disability studies, which the committee provided. Disability-related search terms have now been expanded and updated in the thesaurus. Also, at the committee's suggestion, a bibliography fellowship was awarded to a graduate student in disability studies.

Access Guidelines for Session Organizers and Speakers

The CDI is considering recommending updates to the access guidelines for speakers at the convention, perhaps with a suggestion to provide papers electronically. (Some speakers are not providing paper copies and large-print copies of papers, as suggested in the current guidelines.) Making papers available electronically might bring up issues of intellectual property and may therefore be resisted by members.

Hiring Guidelines for Departmental Search Committees

Skype and telephone interviews, increasingly being used for campus interviews, pose accessibility issues, including, for example, the protocol for the use of sign-language interpreters. The staff reported that the ADFL Executive Committee was in the process of drafting a document offering suggestions on the use of videoconferencing and the telephone for interviews. The committee will review those suggestions at its 2013 meeting.

Employment Guidelines

While institutions are required to provide access and support for students with disabilities, faculty and staff members may not be covered by institutional policies. Human-resource law speaks to some situations (permissible grounds for termination, what “reasonable accommodation” means, etc.). The MLA might help schools know how to go beyond the bare minimum required by the ADA. The committee is considering developing a set of best practices for providing services to faculty members with disabilities, fostering faculty advancement, and promoting nondiscriminatory practices. A preliminary step would be the development of a survey of department chairs to ask what information and services are currently made available to faculty members.

MLA Commons

The committee is developing materials that may be appropriate for inclusion on *MLA Commons*. These materials include guidelines for job seekers and a list of online resources modeled on the *Literature and Medicine* Web site.