Introduction

Charge

The constitution of the MLA charges the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) with the following responsibilities: preparing the agenda for the annual meeting of the Delegate Assembly (DA); receiving, initiating, and reporting on motions and resolutions to be brought before the DA; holding an open hearing on resolutions; acting on matters referred by the DA; nominating candidates for the Elections Committee; working closely with the Executive Council and the staff of the association and meeting at least once a year with the council; and presenting an annual report to the DA on the activities and future of the MLA.

In preparing the agenda for the annual meeting of the DA, the DAOC is guided by the DA bylaws and the MLA constitution. These guidelines give the DAOC a dual role: (1) to provide information that will expedite the delegates’ evaluation of the motions and resolutions prior to and during each DA meeting and (2) to provide recommendations for actions on resolutions. The DAOC is required to take a position on resolutions; it may choose to recommend on motions.

Membership

Each year the DA elects one or two of its members for three-year terms on the DAOC. The DAOC is composed of ten members: six members of the DA (one of whom is a delegate elected to the Executive Council); two members of the Executive Council, elected by the council; and the first vice president and the executive director, who serve ex officio without votes. (By tradition, the assembly’s second representative on the council also serves on the committee as an ex officio member without vote.) Each year the DAOC elects its own chair from among those members elected by the DA.

The 2019–20 members are Angelika Bammer (ex officio), Michelle J. Brazier (chair), Judith Butler (ex officio), Maria Chouza-Calo, Sima N. Godfrey, Jean Elizabeth Howard, Maryse Jayasuriya, Paula M. Krebs (ex officio), Anjali Prabhu, Leah Richards, and Svetlana Tyutina.

Accessibility to Members

Communication with the DAOC is open to the membership of the MLA and the DA through various routes: requests directed either to the committee or to the MLA staff; the formal processes followed for motions and resolutions; the open hearings of the assembly at the convention; and the meeting of the DA at the convention, at which nondelegates as well as delegates may speak. Proposers of motions and resolutions are encouraged to communicate with the committee chair prior to the submission deadline, 1 October.

In December 1997, an electronic discussion list was established to expedite communication and discussion about assembly business immediately before and after the DA meeting. The list allows delegates to ask questions of, request information from, and express opinions to other DA members, the DAOC, and the MLA staff. In August 1999, the list began year-round operation. Since 2013,
delegates have also had access to a private *MLA Commons* group. The Discussion feature of the *Commons* permits a rapid exchange of views and information among delegates, and the Files and Docs functions allow for the sharing of files and the collaborative creation of documents.

**Background Documents**

The DA’s page at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Delegate-Assembly) provides easy access to helpful documents for both delegates and MLA members. Existing documents are updated and new documents are added on a regular basis. For example, in 2011 the DAOC asked the staff to make the assembly’s meeting documents accessible to MLA members; a link to an assembly agenda page was therefore added to the assembly’s Web page. The assembly’s page also includes links to a listing of current assembly members; the Delegate Assembly Bylaws; the *Delegate Assembly Proposal Page*, which was created at the DA’s request and allows delegates and MLA members to solicit feedback on the draft of a motion or a resolution; and the minutes of assembly meetings (going back to 2005). The Motions and Resolutions link on the left side of the assembly’s page brings up an explanation of the two types of proposals that the assembly considers and provides access to other documents of interest: *Preparing Resolutions for the Delegate Assembly*, which outlines the resolutions process and contains especially useful information for those members who wish to propose resolutions; *Checklists for Submitting Resolutions*, which focuses on submission requirements; and a listing of recent resolutions ratified by the membership.

In addition, delegates can retrieve documents from a dedicated document area at the MLA Web site. The document area is intended to provide quicker and easier access to meeting materials and other documents. Some documents are distributed only in electronic form, while others are made available both electronically and on paper.

**Report on the DAOC Meeting**

The DAOC met at MLA headquarters in New York on 23–25 October 2019. Some members were unable to attend all three days: Howard and Butler were not in attendance; Tyutina was present on 23–24 October. Chouza-Calo was present on 24–25 October. All other members were in attendance on all days.

This year the DAOC received one motion by the current 1 October submission deadline. The DAOC determined that the motion complied with requirements for submission; therefore, the proposed motion will be considered at the 2020 Delegate Assembly meeting. The DAOC also received one resolution by the 1 September deadline as required by new procedures that went into effect in mid-May 2019. However, the resolution did not receive the required number of signatures by 1 October, and therefore will not be considered at the Delegate Assembly meeting in 2020.

The DAOC reviewed a proposed amendment to the MLA Constitution which will be taken up on the floor of the Delegate Assembly in Jan 2020: specifically, the introduction of “emergency motions” to the motion/resolution process initiated by the Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy Policies and Procedures (CAPP). As part of the process, the DAOC authorized MLA staff to set dates to
facilitate ratification of this proposed amendment to the Constitution. As necessitated by recent and
proposed changes to the MLA Constitution, the DAOC will also propose several amendments to the
Delegate Assembly Bylaws to bring them into concord with the current MLA Constitution, while
anticipating further constitutional amendments that may be initiated at the 2020 DA meeting.

The majority of DAOC discussion was devoted to the Report of the MLA Task Force on
Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education, chaired by Simon Gikandi, and submitted to the DAOC in
October 2019. DAOC members expressed enthusiasm for this Report in substance and form and
considered it an important next step in the MLA’s broader project of addressing power differentials
in the academy. That project was spear-headed at the DAOC meeting in 2018, followed by
subsequent activities: the DAOC survey of Delegate Assembly Members and the Open Discussion
on “Power Differentials in Graduate Education” at the DA meeting in 2019. Moving that process
forward, the DAOC determined that our Open Discussion in 2020 will be: “MLA Task Force on
Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education: Small Group Discussion of Recommendations.”

As an introduction to the Open Discussion, the DAOC will contextualize the work of the
Task Force culminating in this Report within the chronology beginning with the DAOC survey in
2018 as well as reports that have addressed these issues prior to the DAOC taking them up. Those
reports served as background information for the Task Force in its work (for example, the 2014
Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature & the
January 2013 Guidelines from the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession:
“Improving Institutional Circumstances for Graduate Students in Languages and Literatures:
Recommendations for Best Practices and Evaluative Questions”). The DAOC is also cognizant of
on-going work in this area, for example, by the Committee on Academic Freedom, Professional
Rights and Responsibilities, and we have a strong desire for the DAOC and Delegate Assembly to
work in collaboration with these committees and the Executive Council on these matters.

Our plan for the DA Open Discussion is to be action oriented, to identify the
recommendations from the Report that are most resonant with the DA membership, to solicit their
participation in how those recommendations have been, or could be, addressed and implemented at
their institutions (either currently or where they received graduate training), and finally, to ask what
can be done in future – by the MLA (as an organization) and its constituents, from individual
faculty members and graduate students to the various other groups to which we belong
(departments, divisions, institutions, unions, professional associations, etc.) in order to advance the
implementation of these recommendations. To that end, the Open Discussion will be conducted in a
hybrid structure which will replicate some of the small-group discussion of the past year’s DA
meeting, while also allowing individual members to comment on the report for the record. In short,
we hope the Delegate Assembly will build on the work of this Report as it outlines
recommendations and best practices for ethical conduct in graduate education.
The DAOC thanks Simon Gikandi for his leadership of the Task Force and the efforts of all Task Force members who worked over the summer to produce this Report.

In other business:

- The DAOC determined the order of the agenda for the Delegate Assembly meeting.
- Daniel Seabold, parliamentarian, offered new language for the Delegate Assembly’s rules, which the DAOC endorsed.
- We nominated candidates for the January 2021 Elections Committee election.
- We decided on the presiders for the Open Hearing of the DA at the 2020 convention and on speakers for the orientation of new DA members. (Note: as there will be no resolutions presented at the DA meeting, there will be no Open Hearing on Resolutions scheduled.)
- We heard a report from Paula Krebs, Executive Director, on the MLA’s activities in 2019.

Our meeting concluded with the election of Svetlana Tyutina as the 2020-21 DAOC chair. We are excited for and confident in her leadership.

At our joint meeting with the Executive Council, the DAOC conveyed our plan to focus the 2020 Delegate Assembly Open Discussion on the Report of the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education. We appreciate the Executive Council’s affirmation of our agenda.

As current chair, I’d like to thank former DAOC chair, Cheryl Narumi Naruse, for proposing the topic of power differentials for Open Discussion at the 2019 Delegate Assembly Meeting, and for realizing her vision for an alternative method of interaction on the DA floor. The DAOC is pleased to continue our focus on this vital concern in higher education and to further the conversation at the 2020 Delegate Assembly Meeting. Finally, sincere thanks to my DAOC colleagues for their rich contributions to the work of our committee; to Daniel Siebold for his advice and guidance on parliamentary issues, to Executive Director Paula Krebs for her MLA leadership; and to Leigh Neithardt and Anthony Williams for their support in the transition from Carol Zuses’ longtime role as MLA Coordinator of Governance. We miss Carol and wish her well!