Committee charge: The Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities will address 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 all MLA fields, specifically the right of academic freedom and the responsibility of ethical conduct toward colleagues, students, and institutions. This includes the right and responsibility to understand and participate in institutional governance, planning, budgeting, and resource oversight. The committee will monitor activities connected with the recruitment and promotion of faculty members, especially the MLA Career Center at the association’s annual convention, and receives comments and recommends actions to ensure fairness. In addition, the committee will consider the relations among research, teaching, service, and professional advancement. Specific professional concerns include transparency in the funding of research and teaching, the use and abuse of adjunct instructors, and the recruitment of minorities into the profession. The committee will develop strategies for dealing with bigotry and prejudice on campus and with inappropriate invocations of academic freedom whose effect is restrictive or retaliatory. These concerns engage questions of philosophy, methodology, and politics in the teaching of all fields encompassed by the MLA. The committee is charged with initiating relevant projects and publications but is not empowered to hear individual grievances.

CAFPRR’s charge focuses on academic freedom, professional rights and related responsibilities, and recognizes these core issues are multi-faceted. CAFPRR fulfills this mission through oversight of various documents, guidelines and processes; development of annual convention panels; consideration of issues brought forward by MLA members; and development of statements/recommendations.

Effective committee work doesn’t happen in a vacuum; thus, this year’s committee took CAFPRR’s 2017-18 discussions as one point of departure for its 2018-19 work and developed a work plan to reflect members’ areas of expertise and interests, as well as issues raised by others in related contexts. As part of CAFPRR’s primary recurring tasks, we approved the annual salary recommendations for 2019-20, executed and developed annual convention panels, and considered inquiries from individual MLA members. We also worked on several other items outlined in the section below. CAFPRR conducted this work in person at its annual October 2018 meeting and at the MLA Convention in January 2019, and through video conferences/calls in December 2018, February, March and May 2019.

CAFPRR work on specific matters

- Following up on efforts undertaken in 2017-18, in October 2018 CAFPRR finalized clarification of formal, good-faith job offers to include emailed offers and that candidates be afforded a minimum of two weeks after receipt of a good-faith offer to accept/reject.
- Also in fall 2018, we worked with Anna Chang to ensure that job-search information/links identified in 2017-18 were included in official Career Alert email blasts in November 2018 and January 2019. This task relates to concerns about communication with MLA members that were raised in 2016-17, considered more depth in 2017-18, and continued to be a point of discussion in 2018-19. I return to that item in the next section.
• As part of our oversight of the job search and based on a member’s inquiry, a sentence was added to MLA Guidelines regarding the importance of shielding confidentiality of letters of recommendation; moreover, we considered the new AHA Guidelines re: letters of recommendation and recommended that the MLA consider a similar policy. Another member inquiry led to an update to Guidelines for Search Committees and Job Seekers, indicating that a teaching video should not be required.

• Committee members also examined data on web traffic to various pages related to salary, job search and graduate study, as part of our ongoing conversation on communication between CAFPRR and MLA members.

• In addition to successfully executing our 2019 MLA Convention sessions, CAFPRR members developed two panels for 2020 and collaborated with CCLiP to develop a third session for Seattle.

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**CAFPRR ongoing work**

One of the issues that we continued to consider throughout 2018-19 is **timely and effective communication** between CAFPRR and MLA members. Discussions of how to best direct members to MLA, CAFPRR and even outside resources on matters such as academic freedom, campus carry, etc., led us to consider the idea of a “departmental liaison” who could quickly push out timely, MLA-approved resources to their network, thus enhancing the MLA’s reach and timeliness. The committee considered this in depth at our meetings and MLA staff followed up. Logistical challenges make this type of initiative impossible; however, CAFPRR continues to consider ways for effective communication with members about practical, real-world challenges to academic freedom with as much agility as possible. Certainly, our lively and in-depth conversations on these issues directly inform our panels for 2020, thus engaging with these issues alongside fellow MLA members at the Convention. Yet, our conversations often touched on the desire to engage with MLA folks in other ways as well, ways that don’t rely on attendance at the Convention and instead are as inclusive as possible. This seems particularly important as fewer members seem to be attending the annual convention. While we recognize the Commons is another forum, we also acknowledge that its reach is limited, for various reasons. Perhaps one way to address this challenge is through more direct collaboration with fellow professional organizations such as the AAUP, the AHA and the American Philosophical Association (APA). Indeed, the APA’s [Committee on the Professional Rights of Philosophers](https://www.apa.org/about/committees/philosophy) reached out CAFPRR to inquire about possible conversation as their committee moves from an investigative body to a more ombudsman role; developing closer relationships with similar groups could inform best communication practices for CAFPRR and the MLA more broadly. Likewise, another key to broadening CAFPRR’s message is ensuring that CAFPRR members
have ample time and notice to develop pieces for Profession, and/or other MLA publications, on topics that directly relate to the committee’s charge. At the October 2018 meeting, we found out that the next issue of Profession was dealing with academic freedom; although we hoped at least one of our members could develop a piece for that issue, the 2-3 weeks’ notice simply wasn’t enough time. Certainly, the challenge of effective and agile communication is not unique to CAFPRR, nor to the MLA more broadly; yet it is one issue that we come back to repeatedly in our discussions of academic freedom and professional roles. CAFPRR spends a great deal of its time dedicated to thoughtful consideration of diverse questions that directly impact our heterogeneous membership, and that are, in fact, ripped from current headlines. In our XXI-century, social-media-dominated world, are there other ways that CAFPRR can/should engage with members regarding these issues?

Another primary point of discussion and work throughout 2018-19 focused on the challenges faced by today’s graduate students. At our October meeting, CAFPRR engaged in a robust discussion with Vicky Unruh regarding the graduate student-adviser relationship, and in winter/spring 2019, the committee began initial work on revising the Advice to Graduate Students: From Application to Career document housed on the CAFPRR webpage. Based on our discussions and on a member inquiry concerning the 2019 Convention, the updated version will include reorganized information based on current practices, as well as additional sections on rights & responsibilities of graduate students and advisers, on sexual harassment, and on expectations and behaviors involving grad student participation on conference panels. We also noted the importance of direct communication to grad students/departments about these updated guidelines, once they’re published. Committee members have worked on revisions over the summer in order to have a first draft ready for discussion at the October 2019 meeting in NYC.

CAFPRR grappled with various academic freedom-related matters in meetings and emails throughout the year. One recurring topic was that of academic freedom and its connection to free speech. Examples of free speech and/or academic freedom controversies seemed to abound in 2018-19, and we considered many of them. One of our conversations resulted in a program suggestion for Seattle 2020; the Executive Council graciously considered our suggestion and Nancy Cantor will offer “Whose Freedom? Speech in the Academy” at the 2020 Convention. CAFPRR also referred the case of the closure of an American university in Hungary to the Executive Council for consideration. Yet another query led us to reach out to the AAUP regarding its investigation into a situation involving a faculty member, and still another concern led us to again consult the AAUP regarding its position on HR officers and their
role(s) in faculty hiring and/or discipline. Continued consideration of these issues certainly undergirds all CAFPRR work, and will shape specific agenda items and/or tasks going forward.

**Unmet challenge/Recommendation for future work**

I had hoped to initiate discussion of non-tenure-track faculty positions and their relationship (or lack thereof) to academic freedom both in the classroom and beyond; however, our valuable discussions and consideration of issues related to both graduate students/advising and free speech absolutism occupied most of the committee’s time in 2018-19. CAFPRR’s collaboration with CCLiP on a panel for Seattle 2020 was one step in this direction, but I do hope that in 2019-20 CAFPRR can begin more in-depth conversation and/or consideration of this issue. Indeed, a fair number of the queries/matters regularly brought to CAFPRR’s attention concern non-tenured members (e.g., grad students, visiting faculty, other NTT positions, etc.). CAFPRR/MLA should continue to be explicit about actualized expectations of academic freedom and related professional roles, especially in the context of the 73% of higher Ed faculty who hail from non-tenureable ranks. Some specific issues to be considered include voting rights of NTT faculty; if/how NTT faculty can access academic freedom protections; who decides how full-time NTT positions will be established; the potential effect of full-time NTT positions on a department’s institutional power, etc. For comprehensive and equitable consideration of these and other issues, it’s clear that CAFPRR will best do this in close collaboration with CCLiP. The 2019-20 CAFPRR is a powerhouse, in part due to its deep understanding of academic freedom and free speech and how these issues play out at high levels in a variety of institutional and (social) media contexts. Similarly, CCLiP members have, among many other capabilities, in-depth knowledge and lived experience regarding NTT positions that should inform MLA guidelines with a much-needed “from the ground” perspective. Close collaboration between these two committees will help ensure both an equitable approach for the MLA’s portion of the 73%, and buy-in from proponents of traditionally hierarchical, academic power structures.