

MLA MEMBERS FOR SCHOLARS' RIGHTS MESSAGE (2014)

Dear MLA Member,

The Modern Language Association (MLA) informed its members this week that it will be asking the entire MLA membership to vote on a resolution that would criticize Israel for “denials of entry to the West Bank by U.S. academics” traveling to Palestinian universities. The MLA's Delegate Assembly passed the resolution after a contentious debate by a remarkably narrow vote of 60-53 and the Executive Council has opted to move it on to the membership for consideration. Voting begins on 21 April and runs until 1 June.

We are a group of concerned MLA members who spoke out publicly against the draft resolution during the MLA's recent convention and have since launched a petition and information resource site at <http://www.scholarsrights.com>. The group includes, among others, professors Cary Nelson, Russell Berman and Martin Shichtman.

We oppose Resolution 2014-1 for several reasons. It is poorly framed and was introduced with very weak supporting material. It pulls the MLA into a highly charged political field in a one-sided way. It will divide the membership and weaken the MLA in its capacity to address the urgent matters that we face in higher education today.

We strongly support the principle of unencumbered scholarly travel. Unfortunately Resolution 2014-1 engages this topic in a lopsided way, focusing exclusively on Israel. Recent developments, including in the United States, make it urgent that the MLA affirm its support for scholarly travel everywhere.

We believe maximizing freedom of entry and access for faculty worldwide will facilitate international understanding and enhance research and teaching everywhere and urge all countries to adopt policies that honor that principle.

Please find a link here to a fact sheet that lists many specific problems with the current resolution. We encourage you to review that information, and to sign the petition urging the MLA to choose a different path in this matter.

And at this point, we strongly urge you to vote against the resolution when voting begins on 21 April.