



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 30 – Regional Communication Associations

****Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.****

Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles
Debra J. Ford
Tiffany R. Wang
Amanda G. McKendree
Stacy M. Smulowitz
Wendy Atkins-Sayre
John Haas
Christina Granato Yoshimura
Sara E. Hayden

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Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Hello, I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Thanks for joining us for today's episode.

Hi, listeners and welcome again to *Communication Matters*. For more than a year, COVID-19 has affected every aspect of our lives from how we socialize to how we research to whether we can attend academic conferences. So today's episode of *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*, addresses the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the four regional communication associations: Central States Communication Association, ECA or the Eastern Communication Association, the Southern States Communication Association and the Western States Communication Association. NCA has been proud for years and decades to have a very strong mutually supportive relationship with all of the regional associations. And so I'm really pleased that we're able to bring together the leaders of those associations to talk today on the podcast about how we as associations in the discipline of communication offer scholars and teachers the opportunity to collaborate, innovate, and advance the discipline at the regional level.

Let me tell you a little bit about today's guests. Debra J. Ford is First Vice President of the Central States Communication Association, Associate Vice Provost of the Teaching & Learning Center, and an Associate Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Creighton University.



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Tiffany R. Wang is the Executive Director of the Central States Communication Association. Dr. Wang is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Basic Course Coordinator in the Department of Communication at the University of Montevallo. Amanda G. McKendree is First Vice President of the Eastern Communication Association. Dr. McKendree is also the Arthur F. and Mary J. O'Neil Director of the Fanning Center for Business Communication and an Associate Teaching Professor of Management and Organization at the University of Notre Dame.

Stacy M. Smulowitz is the Executive Director of the Eastern Communication Association and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Scranton. Wendy Atkins-Sayre is First Vice President of the Southern States Communication Association. Dr. Atkins-Sayre is also a Professor of Rhetoric and Media Studies and the Chair of the Department of Communication and Film at the University of Memphis. John Haas is the Executive Director of the Southern States Communication Association. Dr. Haas is also an Associate Professor and the Director of the School of Communication Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Christina Granato Yoshimura is the President-Elect of the Western States Communication Association and a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Montana. Sara E. Hayden is the Executive Director of the Western States Communication Association and a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies also at the University of Montana.

Thank you all for joining us today and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Tiffany R. Wang:

Thanks, Trevor.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I'd like to begin with a general question about how COVID-19 has affected the regional associations. How the pandemic as it accelerated a year ago in the midst of some of the regional conferences, I know all of us were on pins and needles in March and April of last year as we were confronting this growing pandemic. How did you all respond? What was it like from the regional perspective to be dealing with that level of uncertainty? We could start with anybody. Central States, go ahead. Tell us how that all panned out for you.

Tiffany R. Wang:

It was a very difficult and uncertain time. I remember we were already starting to look at what the numbers were looking like. And at that point early on, it was pretty isolated in what locations were being impacted. But with a convention in a major city like Chicago, we were among one of the first cities to really be hit by the coronavirus. And so my colleague, past executive director Chad Edwards organized a series of meetings on the weekly where we would discuss updates on what



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the CDC was saying about it, what the World Health Organization was saying. And we had a backup plan from the jump about what we would need to do if we were going to need to cancel, move to a virtual format, or attempt to hold in person. And I remember like it was yesterday the day we had to decide to cancel. It was a really emotional time. Where you have association leadership, we go into these roles because we love our regional associations. So having to take a vote to cancel a convention for the first time since the World Wars was not a decision we took lightly. But we felt like we had to do what was right even if it came at a financial cost for the health and well-being of our members. And so at that point we didn't know whether we would be able to get out of our contract. So we made that decision knowing it could come at a high financial cost but we felt like we had to do what was right and what was going to ensure that our members were safe. And so the day I think they banned public gatherings in Chicago and at that point, that was the day we voted to cancel it. And then we looked at virtual options but just didn't really have the time to get that together in that short a time frame. So we felt like we would wait until we could do it really effectively this year. But difficult time. I really appreciated members who reached out with support for the decision. But it was a tough decision to make and we didn't have a lot of facts at that time because this was very early.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Did the consequences from the hotel turn out not to be too dramatic?

Tiffany R. Wang:

We ended up not paying any penalties outside of legal fees. It worked out. But we could have been paying six figures in costs. But it all worked out. It all shook out. We were able to, at that point, the pandemic was rising. It was becoming much more prevalent nationwide. So in the end, it all worked out financially. But that's a risk you have to take, doing what's right and what's in the best interest of our organization and our members.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And that's something that I think a lot of our members either at the national level or at the regional level may not quite be as aware of in terms of the consequences that face our associations with cancellation or virtual options and the like. What about ECA? What happened at Baltimore?

Stacy M. Smulowitz:

Yeah. It was a little touch and go in the beginning. And just like Tiffany was saying, we were having the same sorts of discussions. Cheryl Casey is our previous executive director. And so she was really at the home at that point. I was in some of the conversations and meetings and I remember saying to everybody, I think we need to cancel this and I think we need to look at virtual options for next year. And I remember getting some eyeballs looking at me like, what, next year? And I said, yeah, I think this is going to be a long hauler. So we started looking and thank



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goodness, Amanda, right away got on board and started looking at things and she took the reins from there and planned a really wonderful conference for us this year. But it was touch and go at the beginning because I think we were all in such disbelief that something like this could happen and even the hotel was giving us a little resistance in Baltimore until I think it was maybe two or three days after we requested to get out of our contract that the mayor of Baltimore shut down the city. And once that happened, then it wasn't a problem. We love Baltimore. Our members love Baltimore. So we are looking at going back there and I think that was a nice carrot for them as well that we want to come back. We want to be able to use the bags that say Baltimore 2020 on them at some point. Right? So look for this little teaser, spoiler alert coming up. But yeah. So we really looked at what was going on in Europe at the time, what was happening with the CDC, what were the recommendations that the experts were giving us, and really the safety of our members, making sure everybody was safe. Because nobody knew what was going on. I mean we still don't know what's going on but we have a better idea now what to expect and it was just the sheer fear of everything that could be wrong or if you touch something or breath in somebody or whatever. So we didn't know any of those facts last year. So that was the troubling part for us. The hotel, once their mayor shut everything down, they were very good to work with. Our hearts go out to the hospitality industry who's been hit really hard with this and we have been working with even our hotel vendor for this year in Cambridge. We're trying to rework a contract with them for another time. So it's been a lot. We're working on this year's. We're working on three hotel contracts at the same time. We have a hotel next year that's not even open yet so we can't even get in and talk to people. So it's been a little heart-wrenching first-year here as an executive director. But it's been a good learning experience.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. I appreciate that insight too about maintaining those positive relationships with the hospitality industry and the hotel industry. We resigned with Indianapolis and NCA will be going to Indianapolis in 2028. That wasn't a requirement but it was something that we thought was useful and important for maintaining that positive relationship with the hotel. So I'm glad to hear ECA's going back to Cambridge I love Cambridge. So that's great.

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

With Western State's Communication Association, like you say, we had just had our annual convention and when we got back, it was days afterwards that we started hearing things were spreading in the United States and perhaps were already around, certainly were already around when we were at our conference and just did not know it. And as far as we know, no one was affected from that conference. But within a week or two after getting back from the conference, Executive Director Sara Hayden and I started planning contingency wise for the next year, already thinking, wow, we were lucky we got in under the wire. And I believe we were the only association that was able to hold the 2020 convention. And we thought we'd better start planning now and



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figure out what are we going to do. And we're lucky enough to really benefit from being in conversation with the other regionals and micro regionals and national association about what everyone was doing so that we could start on that planning early.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Where did you meet? I forget. I don't think I went to western in 2020.

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

We were in Denver.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Oh nice. Did you see any effects at that conference from the COVID-19 pandemic? People showed up as usual?

Sara E. Hayden:

I would say that they did. It was part of our conversation but I think at this point, we didn't really know how bad it was going to be.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right, right. And we were being told from the White House that it would all go away when the weather got warmer. Yeah. What about Southern? You all ended up with a real sort of situation like all the other regionals where you had to make a decision pretty much on the fly for your, it was scheduled for April I believe, for the April conference. How did that all pan out?

John Haas:

It was a tough decision to make. We were running into this situation where we didn't know whether or not force majeure was going to take effect with the contract that we had with the property. And they were very gracious and they worked with us. But we kept delaying, hoping that somehow things might change and just the situation just kept getting worse. We began to see that the folks were not enrolling in the conference and registering for the conference. I know that at that point, Sean Long who was the program planner for that point, he was terrifically disappointed that this program that he had planned just simply did not bear fruit and that was a big disappointment. And then Wendy also, of course, had the added stress of not knowing exactly what was going to happen going forward after the conference.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. Just by way of information for some of our listeners, what does force majeure mean? I know what it means but just for their benefit, John. What do you mean when you talk about force majeure?



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John Haas:

It is a way of a hotel to keep you in in prison. You can't get out of this contract that you have with the property unless there's something, and literally means that they cannot conduct the business of the hotel. So if a tornado had hit the hotel property we were in, then we would have been free and clear. But as long as a person was able to travel and their hotel was open and there had not been a health emergency declared and we were going to be outside of Dallas. So it was simply not going to be possible to get out of the contract. It was a very difficult situation to be in because otherwise, if we're out of the contract, then we have to pay the full amount even though we did not attend.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. And that's something a lot of our listeners may not appreciate is that these contracts which are often executed years in advance will have some kind of penalty in there that says that unless the person making the contract i.e. Southern States or NCA or whomever shows up and does it, you have to pay and sometimes penalties are really, really very high. We were looking at NCA without force majeure at penalties of upwards of \$3 million. Those contracts are strict. Anyway, Wendy, I'm sorry. People don't necessarily always appreciate that.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

I mean I'll just add I think that's an important part of it. We just had several tortured conversations leading up to it because we were dealing with the heartbreak of having to cancel these great panels that we had planned. Sean had put together an amazing conference that he never got to see. And then many people will know now that he is our late president because he passed away in January. But he was fantastic throughout it and knowing that we needed to make the right decision for our members but at the same time making the right financial decision for the organization. So it was very difficult.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

We were supposed to be going to Cincinnati in about a week for Central States and the theme is Inspire which I think is useful and sort of harkens to some of the themes that NCA's first vice president is working with on the national convention. Debbie, can you tell us a little bit about how the virtual Central States conference is going to unfold?

Debra J. Ford:

We have been working on sort of two tracks or at least two tracks at the same time since last summer, actually since the last convention was canceled to try to figure out what we were going to do this year. So over the summer and up until I think it was January, we were essentially trying to find ways that we could plan both a virtual and an in-person at the same time to maintain our flexibility and our options as the data changed over time. So it eventually became clear obviously



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in January that it was going to be the best, safest fit for us to go virtual. So Tiffany was able to work with the hotel in Cincinnati. She you can explain the details about that. But we have rebooked with them in 2025. And so we were able to maintain that relationship as you suggested. The hotel was very approachable about staying in contact with us, wanting to know what we were doing in terms of our decisions and those kinds of things. So I think that that conversation went as well as could be expected over those months. And then we did decide to go virtual as I noted. Tiffany was able to review virtual platforms from several organizations and we selected one that I'm very comfortable with. I think that it's going to be relatively easy for people to use. We did have a conversation with the executive committee about the scope of how virtual we are or would be. So initially, my thought was we should do a smaller scope convention virtual because it is a different experience. But as we talked with the executive committee, it became clear that we really needed to address the needs of our graduate students, our young faculty, actually all of our faculty and members who have a variety of needs that are met beyond networking and getting back together at the conference. So rather than doing it asynchronous, rather than doing a small scope, the conference was already planned to go face-to-face if we could. So we just moved that plan to a virtual schedule. So the program, when you look at the actual document, it looks like we're still meeting in person because we use the rooms as guides for assignments, the times are the same, all of those kinds of things. So now it's a matter of clicking on a link to get to a session rather than walking to a room. So I'm hoping we've done as much planning as we can anticipate and we will be adapting on the fly as we learn.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. I know that ECA has decided to foreground a very appropriate and timely theme, Resilience, in the face of all of these dynamics happening in the world. What can we look forward to next week with regard to ECA's convention and the resilience that will all emerge from that virtual experience, feeling and embracing?

Amanda G. McKendree:

I think our theme Resilience has transformed since we selected it in 2019. When I first sat down with my conference planning team and we were thinking about what we wanted our theme to be, we thought about what seems to be a natural extension of innovation which was the 2020 theme? And we thought, well, there's resilience that's necessary to achieve innovation but then in some ways, you can look at resilience as a response to or in reaction to innovation. And that was the initial motivation for selecting resilience. As the year unfolded, it certainly took on a new meaning and a new significance for us. Part of the planning process involved learning what was on the minds of our members and we distributed surveys and received feedback. I had a number of conversations with past ECA presidents and other association leaders to determine what was going to be the best organization and structure if we were moving to a virtual format. From the advice that I received, we followed a very similar approach to what Central seems to be doing as



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well in that we're keeping our traditional structure of panels and we have round tables, we have a debate option this year. So the program structure looks very much like it would look like for an in-person conference. We did add in a couple of different types of events and move some events around. For example, typically our welcome would be Thursday evening. But this year it makes sense to schedule that Thursday morning. But while everyone logs in for the first time, we can talk people through the site, give them some quick tips on navigating different features and functionalities of the site. We made some of those smaller changes but overall the schedule looks very much like it would if we were meeting in person in Cambridge.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. I know the bigger issue for NCA when we had to go virtual last Fall was one of scale. We have 1,200 programs and panels and meetings and all of that that we try to program every year. I know that you all have done a tremendous job of recreating that sort of in-person experience and I think that's fantastic. So let's stick with Southern. You all are meeting under a theme of Harboring Hope which I think is wonderfully hopeful and I think that's nice. You were scheduled to be in Norfolk, Virginia. Now you're going to be held virtually from April 5th to the 9th. Tell us a little bit about how that virtual format is going to look for Southern.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

Yeah. I mean I'll first say the theme, how fortuitous was that. Of course, I had no idea when I chose—well, there were other reasons when you did hope before COVID. And it was following up on Sean's theme of disruptive communication which I also think was well-timed. So we knew we wanted to plan an option that would provide a synchronous experience. Obviously, we had a little more time to work with to find that. We're also smaller so we knew that we could potentially pull that off with the synchronous. And we think we found a great option. We're working with Conference Direct who we've worked with for years and planning the on-site conferences normally. But they know us, they knew what we were looking for. And so we will have all synchronous sessions but also options for private meetings and private conversations which I think is really exciting. That's just a way to replicate those hallway conversations. And they may be a great option going forward too. The panels will all be recorded. So if there will be a chance for attendees to go back and watch. We've planned some special sessions. For example, we will have a memorial reception for Sean Long where we can share stories, talk about what he meant to the attendees, to the organization. And even the Osborne Reception which is our traditional way of ending Southern, we're going to have that on Friday night and we'll have options for breakout rooms so that people can still meet with their longtime friends and hopefully pull in some newcomers and have those conversations. So we're excited about it and about to send out more information so that people can start playing with the conference website and get familiar with it.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. And did you have a difficult time with the hotel properties in Norfolk?

John Haas:

Well, they were very gracious and they were working with us. But they also would not set aside force majeure until the appropriate time. So what we had to do was to think this through but without a whole lot of public activity because once you go public with what your plans are, then force majeure, end of story. So I won't misrepresent. We had to give it some thought because let's face it, you had to plan for both contingencies and that made Wendy's job that much more difficult. And then we even considered a third option. We even considered the possibility of having some kind of hybrid where you could have people showing up at Norfolk but then have some sessions online. But the cost of that would have been the worst of both worlds. So we set that aside fairly quickly.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

We've discovered that as well at NCA, the notion of a hybrid option especially when in NCA, we're talking 1,200 sessions in total over the span of three days. And it's not feasible. It's not feasible. Are you doing any sort of plenary sessions or live streaming sessions where presumably everybody gets to come at Southern? And how's that going to work?

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

We do have an opening reception the night before panels begin so that we can meet with everyone, let them know how things will work, and again, they'll have breakout room possibilities. So they can chat with people that they know. The memorial reception that I mentioned will be open to all and then we also have an awards night. And so everyone is welcome to come there. And it will actually celebrate last year's winners as well as this year's award winners. So that's exciting. But no, we decided not to have keynote speakers necessarily this year since things were so different.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So what about Western? I know you all postponed the Irvine Conference that was scheduled for February this year. But you're allowing the or you're providing the keynote speech. You're providing that in an alternative format. Can you tell us a little bit about how that's going to operate, Christina?

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

Sure. And absolutely, we actually thought pretty hard about what we wanted to be able to offer. Much like you all are saying, we realized that trying to do something online fully was going to be difficult for us as an association given our financial considerations but also our size and yet we



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didn't want to have a year go by where we did not have connection with our members or provide some of that real stimulation that we think comes out of that conference for people. And so what we decided to do was not hold an online conference per se but to offer through the month of February when we would usually meet virtual offerings. And so we actually did several of those. One of them you noted was the keynote speaker. We actually were under contract with Veronica Reyes, the keynote speaker before the last conference was even over. And we were pretty committed to trying to honor any contracts that we had because, again, our hotel that we were booked with for Irvine was very generous with us and we wanted to pay forward that we weren't trying to have anyone compromised by canceling a convention if we could help it. And so we started with saying we'll still have the keynote speaker give some sort of presentation virtually. And then we decided to expand it a little bit. We really thought about what the needs of the membership were and we asked about that through online polling of members. And some things that really people wanted, one was connection for graduate students. This is a really tough time as you all know for graduate students to figure out what their next steps are. And so we continue to have our annual discussion with graduate directors from different programs in the West and have them come and talk with students. And so we had that as a recorded Zoom session. We had some graduate students live and then we have that on our website now so that people can take advantage of that kind of discussion of how can you create a good graduate application now in these times and is it a good time to go to grad school. We invited anyone with a departmental membership with us to be part of our virtual graduate open house. So we created a Google Doc where we had information, we arranged times for people to meet and posted that so that people could still have that kind of effect that we usually have of our open house after the discussion with grad directors. And then the other thing that we did was we invited members who wanted to have ongoing activity this year to propose something that would be helpful as an online session. And so it wasn't necessarily in line with any theme. It was more in these times, we want to have professional or personal growth opportunities for people and what might those be. And so we just put out a call to members and we got a number of those and reviewed them and had six different sessions through the month of February on things like cultivating compassion at work or some of them were on self-care for graduate students, some of them were on how to work in leadership and resilience with students during these times as teachers. And so we had all of those arranged as Zoom sessions throughout the month as well.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. And are those all still available on the website?

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

The two that we recorded were the discussion with the graduate directors and the keynote. The graduate director one is up there. The keynote one is still getting transcribed for closed captioning. So that should be up soon. The others were, some of them were more personal. We opted not to



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record those and just leave those live for people. And so those were not options that we have up there.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. I asked that largely to highlight how wonderful your new website is. Western's new website is phenomenal. It really looks nice and I thought, well, that's a way I can promote that a little bit. So be sure to visit, what is it? Westcom.org?

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

Mm-hmm.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

It's a nice new site. It really is.

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

Lots of credit to Dr. Marnel Niles Goins on that one.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Oh, good for her, good for her. Thinking about other services I guess or other benefits that the regional associations and what NCA offers for its members, how have you had to make adaptations in those sorts of realms or those sorts of things for the pandemic and for this evolving new normal that we find ourselves in? What has Central States done, for example, to reach out to its members and to keep them engaged outside of the convention?

Tiffany R. Wang:

I think something that has been really difficult for some of my colleagues who are on the job market this year is not having access to professional development resources and in some cases, not even having access to faculty in person. Where I think about when I was on the job market, I would pop by my dissertation advisor's office or my graduate director's office and say, hey, here's how the job market's going. Do you have any suggestions? Can you watch my job talk? Can you look over my materials so that I can make sure I'm putting my best foot forwards to increase the likelihood that I would land a tenure track position? And also, for mid-career scholars too, we often see the convention as this place where we reconnect, come up with research ideas, maybe I would go to a gift session and be able to get an idea that I could implement in my classroom. So one of the initiatives that I'm really excited about that we're going to be doing this year both in the convention and outside the convention is our Next Leaders Network series which we are launching this year. So what we did was our second vice president-elect Kathy Denker at Ball State University put up polls where people could sign up to be a mentor or to find to mentor. And so it was really robust. I signed up myself because I thought it's really important to give back to



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the association. If she can find me an appropriate match, I don't know if she has yet, she's going to let me know if I matched. I don't know. I might not. But basically, we wanted to give opportunities for people to connect one-on-one throughout the year with somebody who had expertise in something that somebody needed mentorship in. So for example, if I'm a grad student and I want advice on how I can be a better teacher in the classroom, then I might be matched with somebody who has a lot of teaching experience. Or maybe I'm a mid-career scholar and I'm wanting to get those last few pubs I need to get to full professor. We would match them with one of our hall of famers or life members or full professors who could help people kind of take their research to the next level. And so our intention is that this is something that will be done individually where you get that chance. If I want to hop on a Zoom call and grab coffee with my mentee outside of the convention, I have that opportunity because I've been very fortunate. It's one of the reasons I love Central States. I have people, like Debbie's a great example, who have been wonderful mentors to me when I was a graduate student or an early career faculty member. I think I've shared this story a couple times. But I remember I was on the job market and I was at a networking session and I found out shortly before that session that I was not getting a job and that's awkward to have that kind of emotional thing in person. Right? And I remember going to networking session and I'd never met Debbie before. And that's just who I happened to match with. Like we would rotate and meet people. And she provided such great wisdom and support and encouragement and then it all worked out. The following week, got a job offer. I was headed to a tenure track position. But in a really difficult time for me emotionally and just I mean we've all been on the job market. It is, the imposter syndrome kicks in big time. So we just wanted to have something where people could feel like, hey, I've got somebody who's not at my school, who understands what I've been through, who wants to help people. And then I think it just has great benefits for you as a mentor too. Like just to be able to meet somebody new in the association. So we're doing that year round and then we're going to integrate it with three convention sessions. So we'll have one that's a social with our executive committee officers for people who are newer or brand new. And then we'll also have a session targeted at mid-career scholars looking to go up for full. I think it's great. We're talking about how to thrive during a really difficult time and find fulfillment and make an impact in the field as you move forward which I think is so important. As a mid-career scholar myself, I'm excited about that session. And then we'll also have one for undergraduate and graduate students so that they'll be able to learn about the grad school process. How do you maintain some semblance of a work-life balance in a pandemic? I know we have people on the panel, they're not even in the city where their grad program is. So how do you get in touch with people in your cohort? So I'm really excited to see kind of what that brings. And then hopefully next year, we'll be able to do what we had planned which was we were going to have food and beverages and more kind of informal where you can bump into somebody and talk to them and strike up a conversation. Because as we all know, that's where some of the best friendships are formed, in the hallways outside of a session, meeting somebody that shares your interests at the



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bar, grabbing a drink where you have some of my favorite interactions I have at convention. So we're just trying to recreate that but in a more virtual space.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I really do think though that this question of mentorship and professional development is something that the regionals are in many ways very uniquely poised to offer. A lot of folks complain that NCA's just so big and walk down the hallway and there's 50 million people. The intimacy of the regional convention can be really useful in that regard and I think that's great. That's an exciting initiative. Stacy, what are we finding at ECA? What what is ECA doing to innovate and to resiliently recapture the attention and the engagement of its members in these difficult times?

Stacy M. Smulowitz:

Well, we have brought on a wonderful new social media director, Rikishi Ray. And she and Doug have been, and Doug who's been with us for a while doing this position, they have really worked so hard to build up our social media presence and to engage people online. She is working to do some interviews with people in the association who maybe have written a new book or have something published or something new in their career that they're excited about and to feature some of our members in that way. I think, Amanda, did you want to talk about a couple of things too?

Amanda G. McKendree:

For us, I think what comes next might depend on what happens next week. For the first time, we'll have access to data that we normally do not have access to in terms of our attendee participation in certain events, how many different sessions people are logging into when participating, how many page views, how many total page views we will have across the conference. And from there, we'll be able to determine where seemed to be the most popular issues or where are the members' interests most prevalent. And I think once we have that data and that feedback, that might help shape a very different conversation after the virtual conference next week.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Sara, is Western doing anything in particular to keep people engaged I guess is the main thing?

Sara E. Hayden:

Well, one of the things we did, we decided that because we weren't having our convention, we wanted to encourage people to keep their memberships because we find that people often sign up for their memberships in conjunction with the convention. And so we eliminated fees for anyone who had been a member of the prior year. They were able to renew their membership without cost and any student could—and still can so if you're a student and you'd like to be a member of Western, you can become a member without cost for this year until the end of '21. And for people



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who are not students but are interested in joining us and weren't members last year, you can sign up for half cost. So we thought especially during these times when people are struggling financially that that would be something that we could do to help people maintain their membership and maintain their connection to our association.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. Is Southern doing any particular outreach or initiatives along those lines to keep people connected with the Southern States beyond the virtual convention?

John Haas:

We are. And I'll begin by thanking my colleagues for all their wonderful ideas they provided us with their website. Everything that could go wrong seems to have gone wrong this year. We were in the process of updating our website when it turned out our vendor was going to change their platform and they would not be in a position to deal with our updates until May. So that kind of also set the conference aside. What we did was the opposite of what Western did. Given that most institutions will reimburse for conference registration but they won't reimburse for membership, what we did was to give a free membership for a year as long as you registered for the conference. And then they're going to get some reimbursement for that. So that was one way of trying to make them continue to be engaged. Traditionally, we had a large constituency that really liked a paper copy, a hard copy of a newsletter. Well, that's going out electronically now because what we also found is that when we were sending things, for example, when we started sending out awards from last year, a lot of people were not going back to their host institution. They were staying home. And I had one person call me and was fairly unhappy about not being able to get this plaque. It's understandable because the person did really good work and merits some sort of recognition for that. But it was stuck in the mail room at that particular institution and at that point, there's really not a whole lot we could do. But we've been trying to reach them in different kinds of ways, trying to make sure that they continue to maintain membership in the organization because that's something we were concerned with going forward is are we going to see a big drop in membership.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Something you said about making your newsletter electronic speaks to the question of how it is we resiliently innovate as a reaction to COVID-19 and to all of the other dynamics going on these days. And beyond the newsletter, is there any other ways that—I know we've converted *Spectra* in large part because a) we think people are more likely to read *Spectra* if it's electronic but b) I think a lot of *Spectras* are sitting in people's mailrooms and mailboxes. So are there other innovations that we can make or have made that respond, resilience teaches us that we use crises to innovate, to think anew, to rethink. Are we in a period where we're looking at permanent



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virtual or half virtual, half-in-person conventions? I don't know. I'm just curious. Any other innovations you all want to want to share or talk about?

John Haas:

I'll share one more and that's the opportunity to use social media. Because since so many people are staying on social media, that's one area where we're trying to grow that over the course of the next 12 months as well, try to make use of it this past year. But it's also a little bit unclear at this point, I haven't seen too much data on this, about where people are engaging. Because I think they're overwhelmed. They're bombarded with messages. They're bombarded with Zoom requests. So trying to sort this out going forward is going to be an interesting task.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

I think there's some possibility, I mean this would have to be decided with larger groups, but it's nice to see people who haven't been able to come to regional conferences or national conferences who can attend virtually. I mean we know that there's an experience that can't be replicated online. But at the same time, some people don't have the option. So I can just imagine an option going forward where someone might be able to present virtually a much better option I think than having someone else read the paper. I can see that happening. Also, this year at southern we're including a series of panels on professional development. They cover topics like applying to graduate school, getting your first job, grant writing, those kinds of things. And I'm hoping that the panelists will agree to let us share those videos and then sort of build on them over the years so that we can have that available for members and keep adding and provide some great resources for our members.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. Yeah, Sara?

Sara E. Hayden:

Yeah. I just want to reiterate what Wendy said about the potential to use some of these electronic resources to bring people to the convention who otherwise couldn't come to the convention. This is something we've been talking about for years. We know that it's so expensive especially for graduate students. We know that some people have family care taking responsibilities that make coming to conventions really difficult. And so I think if we can take some of what we've learned this year to incorporate into our future conventions, then it can really be part of really our social justice mission for our members. I think the other thing we've learned is that holding some of our meetings, we have really long meetings. I know different associations have different practices here. But we typically have very long meetings during both NCA and our own convention. And I think one of the things we've realized is those meetings don't need to be so long and that we can also, if we have to bring some people in electronically, that that might be a really useful way of



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making sure we get a lot of different people's voices heard without having to make people travel across the country.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

We really experienced that at NCA. There was a lot of nervousness or anxiety about a virtual legislative assembly meeting. But once it was done, everybody was like, we need to keep doing this because there was really a great sort of feeling about the efficiency that that virtuality brought about. I'm sorry. I just wanted to add that little side note. John, you wanted to say something else too.

John Haas:

Yeah, I just want to jump in for a second on this. And the challenge going forward, since I suspect that all of us have signed contracts with hotel properties for several years in advance, I completely agree with what Sara's saying, that accessibility is really and accommodations I think are really important and that's something that we ought to continue to value and to push as part of our meetings. But I also have to put that business head on at the same time and think about we've committed to X number of room nights, we've committed to F and B for our food and beverage minimums. And so trying to create a model where that will work where people who wish to attend in person can attend and people who would choose to be at the convention electronically, making that work from the business viewpoint is going to be a little bit of a challenge.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's really true. Christina? Yeah?

Christina Granato Yoshimura:

Yeah, just we have signed, we plan to be in Portland in 2022. And I know it's difficult seeing that we could do some virtual options and then how many are we actually going to be able to do during a conference as we're talking about. The finances of that are difficult but one of the real gifts of this time I think has been really getting more collaborative with our membership and listening really hard to what people want. Although I know the conferences that are going to be on Zoom and online are wonderful, we also got a lot of feedback like, thank you for not holding something right now. Right? Thank you for just giving us some space. And when we come back, then we can do this in ways that don't necessarily need to be as institutionalized as an entire virtual conference. But one of our presentations that one of our members from a community college came up with was how to use Google more effectively, the Google Suite. And I went to that one and was thinking, why am I not using this more often? Like there's a lot that you can do. Or so many of us who have Zoom. And so when we're in Portland, even if we cannot quite afford to have everything accessible virtually, so many of us have the ability to share that with our colleagues by recording in the room or by bringing our own laptops and Zooming people in. And



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I really just see that collegiality being something that's built over this time that when we do come back together, we can all work together at looping in lots of the membership even if it's not always in these fully structured institutionalized ways.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, I think that's right. Sara?

Sara E. Hayden:

Yeah. And I would just say just to clarify, I'm not saying I don't see us doing a fully virtual or even mostly virtual conference. I think one of the things, John, you're talking about it in terms of our business hats. And absolutely, that's really important. But I think one of the other things we know as communication scholars is that being in the same place face-to-face, interacting together, the energy that we get from that is so important. And I think people really want to do that again. I don't see this as the end of conventions. I think if anything we've learned how much we grow and enjoy being with one another in a face-to-face kind of situation.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, I think that's right. The real balance is negotiating all of that, isn't it? Right? Because I agree, Sara. One of the things we heard so palpably I guess after Indianapolis and the virtual convention in Indianapolis so to speak was a lot of people, just people who were surprising themselves at how much they missed going to NCA. And it's like that's music to my ears because you want people to miss that. But it's balancing that with the needs that a lot of people have to be able to participate while not being physically present is really something down the road.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

It's more about the human element. This will be the second year in a row that we have not met in person for Southern. And so I just felt that it was really important, I think all of us felt that it was a good decision to have of this virtual option. But yes, we will definitely be pushing for the in-person option next time and I think it'll be even more important for all of the regional organizations to have a good showing for the next conference so that we can come back together and strengthen those organizations again.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So thinking into the future, we are still hopeful at NCA that we'll at least have a significant in-person conference and presence in Seattle in November. Where is Western? it's in Portland in February of 2022. Okay. That's great. And then Southern is Greenville, South Carolina in 2022. Right?



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Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

Which is a beautiful place. If people haven't been there, there's a river that runs right through the city.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

A river runs through it.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre:

Yeah. And lots of opportunities for walking all around downtown, new restaurants popping up. So yeah, it'll be an exciting place to go after all that we've been through. It's not too late to participate in this year's Southern. We're actually open for registration now and if you go to SSCA.net, you can find out more about the organization.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Interesting. This pandemic, listening to all of you talk about the ways in which the conferences are going to operate and all of the innovations and changes, I'm struck at NCA and I suspect you all are too that we're sort of in this weird middle place. A lot of people, a lot of our members are appreciative of these new virtual options. They're really allowing people who may not come to the convention to get involved with the convention. But at the same time, we have a lot of members, members who normally weren't this expressive of saying in varieties of ways, I really missed getting together in November. I really missed that, what Tiffany was talking about, that face-to-face interaction. And I think this is a moment for all of us in the association world to think about how communication matters within our particular individual associations. I'm wondering, Debbie, if the folks at Central States are using this opportunity to maybe rethink or re-evaluate or re-articulate the value of associations and learned societies and associational life for its members? I know we are at NCA and I'm curious what's going on at the regional level as well.

Debra J. Ford:

We've had some initial discussions about what it is that people reach out to the organizations for, choose to join for, those kinds of things. I think that after next week, we're going to have a much better understanding of what a virtual conference can do and maybe is more limited in doing, one of those being what you mentioned. And we'll be able to have a different conversation going forward. One of the things I've noticed is that some of the attendees are reaching out to say, thank you, I wouldn't be able to go otherwise because of accessibility issues, travel issues, health issues, those kinds of things. And so that is a different issue. It's kind of a balancing issue I might say to being able to get together in person which is one of the key things people said about our organization last year when we canceled and then what we may be missing this year when we're virtual. So it's going to be interesting to see what the conversations are once the conference is over.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

What about ECA? Are you all having meaningful, thoughtful discussions about the value I guess of association membership in these challenging times?

Amanda G. McKendree:

Just one quick follow-up to Debbie's comment, I think in addition to helping attract different people, a more diverse group to attend our conference, we were also able to attract a more diverse set of keynote speakers and participants for our fireside chats. And that has been very helpful too. Just allowing for the flexibility has allowed us to think more broadly and to create more opportunities for people to be keynote speakers or fireside chat panelists who might not typically get to do that because of travel restrictions or other reasons. So for us, that was a helpful element too. Even though we have to be virtual, we now can bring in these speakers and maybe attract different attendees.

Stacy M. Smulowitz:

We have heard from so many of our members in the last month or so that they had this pent up, just they couldn't wait to register for the conference. They were emailing. I mean Kathie Cesa who's our membership director, everybody knows and loves Kathie. And she was emailing me initially with somebody who would say, oh, when is it going to be open? And she started emailing me. And then finally, she said, I can't keep sending these to you. We're getting so many of them. So members are just so hungry for this community that we bring. ECA brings and Central. We all bring this. And I'm hearing from members that they want to share their research. They miss that from last year. They didn't get to share their research with their friends and other colleagues. They want to collaborate with people. They want to learn from other people. They want to see people even if it's here, just through the screen. They can still see people and that brings them some sense of community and something that they can really count on. Like this is the Spring. ECA is supposed to happen in the Spring. And so it brings a little bit, if just a little glimpse of this is a normal thing for us to do in the Spring is to gather with this ECA community and share with each other. Right? And even though we may be looking at things a little bit differently. So for example, at NCA, I noticed myself I was trying to figure out, well, how do I fit this into my teaching schedule? Whereas when I go to NCA, that's not what I do at all. I go to NCA and I don't worry about. But even now I'm getting emails from some people saying, well, how about this meeting or that meeting? Do you think it'll be over by this time? Because my class starts at whatever time. And so it's a whole different way of going to a conference now. And so I think what we're all saying is we have to see how this works out for us.

Tiffany R. Wang:

I just wanted to share a quick anecdote because I think it's relevant to what we're all talking about. But when I think about even just planning the business meeting, I know all of our groups, that's a



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kind of complex thing to undertake even live. Right? Where you have all of the speakers and you have, we're talking about association business. And so I know we'll be talking about revisions to our constitution to ensure that we're promoting diversity and inclusivity and financial transparency more so than we have in the past. I think all of our associations have room to grow. And so how does that look in that virtual space? And so one fun thing that's been happening has been we mailed all of our plaques out prior to the convention to all of our members and we actually had, we have a graduate student from Ohio University, Heather Mathis helping us out with social media. Because I was going, I'm like old enough at this point where what I think we should be doing on social media is not what our grad students want to be seeing. And so she thought it would be really fun if we had people send selfies of themselves with their plaques when they arrived. And so one thing that's going to be fun, I guess this is like a sneak peek teaser, for our business meeting is I'm actually inserting people's selfies with their plaques in our business meeting slides. So we have their headshot. It's them with their plaque. So we have people on their campus with their plaque. We are federation prize. They had a Zoom call where they all have their plaque. And I got a text from one of our hall of famers with his crystal trophy. And so just kind of those kinds of fun things, trying to find ways, how do we celebrate people's accomplishments? These are career accomplishments. They're never going to be able to have that again. And so we're working on what can we do next year to reconnect and celebrate what our awardees. So we're talking about should we have like COVID award winners and have like a party just for them to celebrate them? Should we do a session? But I think it's really fun. And then I even went and took the ribbons, the hall of fame ribbons that people get when they're a hall of famer and I photoshopped them onto their picture on the slides. So they will get their ribbon for the first time virtually. And then we can't wait to, of course, give it to them in person for their name badge. So it's just those kinds of things where I'm trying to go, how can we still make this special while being synchronous? Right? And so that's what I've been just trying to think about. Because that's something I would be so sad to miss out on, that chance to be at the luncheon and have your name read out and go to the stage and get your plaques. I've been just trying to find ways that we can talk to those people, those members who are getting recognized. And I even asked them. I was like, what would make a difference to you that would feel special? So we've been featuring like videos highlighting their mentorship or their teaching or their scholarship on social media. And then we've done pre-recorded announcements that have quotes from their packet. And so we're just trying to find ways that we can make it different but still really special. It just is a different time and I know many of us at NCA, we had things that we would have loved to have picked up in person or gotten to see our friends or gotten to present live. And so we're just trying to kind of find ways that we can make it look different but still feel like they're valued and that their work and accomplishments are important.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, that's great. And that's really creative. Yeah, Debbie?



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Debra J. Ford:

I don't know if you noticed what Tiffany did there. She did a very good job of incorporating our theme for next year which is Reconnect. As you probably know we froze, our officer rotation so I'm planning next year as well. So one of the things that we're doing is taking into account what's happening this year as well as the fact that we canceled last year and what does that mean for next year's conference. So as I said, Reconnect's the theme. But one of the things we want to do is expand to the extent we can afford the celebrations that we would have had. We don't normally do a special reception for the hall of fame awardees. But we may be able to do that next year, things like that because now we've got two years of hall of fame awardees who have not been able to celebrate with their friends and family and colleagues in person.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Now remind us, where is Central State's going to be in 2022?

Debra J. Ford:

Madison, Wisconsin.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Madison, Wisconsin. Okay. That was a big convention the last time you all were there.

Debra J. Ford:

It was. It was a really good experience. The hotel's the Concourse. Is that correct, Tiffany?

Tiffany R. Wang:

Yeah.

Debra J. Ford:

It was a good experience. So I'm looking forward to going back there. But that this way we can link together these experiences we've had over the last couple of years and bring us back together hopefully in person.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. Now if I'm not mistaken, ECA is going to be in Buffalo, New York. Is that right? In 2022?

Amanda G. McKendree:

Yeah. We are scheduled for Buffalo, New York.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

We're hoping to see all of you in Seattle, Washington in November for NCA. At this point, we're thinking we're going to hopefully be in person and there might be some wiggle room there. But that's our hope. We're monitoring everything as we can. But in 2022, we'll definitely see everybody in New Orleans for NCA. So thank you all so much for joining us. And best of luck to Central States and to ECA with their conventions happening as this podcast drops.

In NCA News, doctoral students can now apply to take part in NCA's virtual Doctoral Honors Seminar, which will be held July 14 to 16. The Doctoral Honors Seminar provides the opportunity for promising doctoral students to work with distinguished Communication faculty members. This year, the seminar will feature three tracts: Mass Communication and Media Studies, Social Science, and Rhetoric and Performance Studies. So interested students can learn more about the faculty mentors on the NCA website and apply by May 14, 2021. That's May 14, 2021 at natcom.org/DHS.

Also, registration is now open for NCA's virtual Chairs' Summer Institute, to be held on June 25 and 26. This year's theme is "Leadership Challenges in a Changing World." Participating department chairs will explore how to cultivate respect and inclusive cultures, how to manage challenges associated with digital learning and socially distanced department communities, and how to motivate and mentor faculty, and so much more. So register by June 1, 2021 at natcom.org/CSI.

Finally, NCA's virtual Institute for Faculty Development, also known as the "Hope Conference," will be held July 19 to 23. The annual Hope Conference provides the opportunity for undergraduate Communication faculty to learn about new directions in theory and pedagogy and to develop new course area expertise. Registration will be heavily discounted this year. Both NCA members and non-members will be able to register for just \$50. Learn more about the Hope Conference at natcom.org/hope-conference.

And, listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters* on April 8. Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch, authors of *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*, will join me for a conversation about the state of graduate school today and the possibilities for reforming doctoral education. I hope this upcoming episode will shed light on questions to consider as programs adapt to the growing number of PhDs whose careers take them outside of university teaching and research positions. Be sure to tune in for this exciting new episode of *Communication Matters*, the NCA podcast.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get



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your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles. The podcast, organized at the national office in downtown Washington DC, is produced by Assistant Director of External Affairs and Publications Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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