Vice Chair Report
Public Address Division
National Communication Division
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Submitted by Mari Boor Tonn, University of Richmond

First, I wish to thank Susan Schultz Huxman for substituting for me last year at the Planning Session and also being my proxy as proxy for Chuck Morris last year in delivering his Vice-Chair report. As you recall, last year’s meeting was a bit like musical chairs given the boycott of the Manchester Hotel, illness, semesters abroad, and family emergencies, the latter of which prevented me from attending NCA last year. Thus, I also want to reiterate thanks to Kirt Wilson for substituting for Jennifer Merciea while she was in Italy, and James Darsey for agreeing at the last minute to present top paper awards in Chuck’s place. Whew!

Acknowledgments:

First, I wish to thank the reviewers of individual paper and panel submissions who worked especially hard this year for two reasons. First, submissions were up significantly this year. Second, I opted to have all submissions reviewed by three reviewers rather than only two so as to allay some concerns expressed in other divisions and on CRTNET about the reviewing process when a dramatically split decision occurred between two reviewers. I wish to thank the following reviewers:


I also wish to thank those who generously agreed to serve as respondents or chairs and in some cases both. I extend sincere appreciation to the following individuals:


Submission and Session Statistics:

The Public Address Division received 129 total submissions this year (35 more than the 94 in 2008). Individual paper submissions totaled 94 (22 more than the 72 in 2008). Session submissions totaled 35 (13 more than the 22 in 2008).

The Public Address Division again was allotted 31 slots, two of which were slotted with our Business meeting and the Nichols Award panel. I utilized an additional slot available in the Five Years Out Series for a submitted session, which was appropriate for that venue. I also scheduled two individual paper submissions and one session submission in the Scholar-to-Scholar venue. In filling out our program—the 31 allotted slots, and the three additional slots—the Division accepted 70 of 94 papers submitted (74%) and 31 of 35 panel sessions submitted (88%) These percentages are higher than in 2008 when acceptance rates were 66% for individual papers and 77% for panel session submissions. But the number of rejections closely mirrors 2008, rejecting 24 paper submissions (identical to 2008) and rejecting 4 panel session submissions (1 less than in 2008). Due to the increased number of submissions and reviewers’ comments on the quality of submissions, I opted to place four papers on created sessions.
Awards:

Reviewers' ratings of submitted papers were tabulated and rank-ordered by All Academic. A “Top Papers” session was created for the Division’s most superior papers based on the accumulated rankings. I am pleased to present the following two Division Awards.

The Robert J. Gunderson Award is given annually for the Top Student Paper in Public Address. This year’s winner is Kashif Powell of California State University, Long Beach for his paper entitled, “E Pluribus Unum: Barack Obama’s Use of Constitutive Rhetoric.” Powell's paper explores Barack Obama’s use of constitutive rhetoric in five of his landmark speeches: his 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, his February 2007 announcement speech to pursue the Presidency, his March 2008 “A More Perfect Union” address on race, his 2008 Acceptance Address at the Democratic National Convention, and his November 2008 victory address on election night. Powell’s paper considers implications of his racial identity and the racial identities of his constituted audience.

The Wrage-Baskerville Award is given annually to the Top Contributed Paper in Public Address. This year’s winner is Tammy Vigil of Boston University for her paper entitled, “FDR’s 1932 Commonwealth Club Address: Building Ethos by Offering Stability through Change.” As the title suggests, Vigil’s paper focuses on FDR’s 1932 Commonwealth Club address and argues the speech holds significance as an effective exemplar of ingratiation strategies, successful creation of rhetorical personae, and ability to provide audiences with a sense of stability in a time of chaos and uncertainty. All three reviewers applauded this paper as “well-written,” “well-researched,” and “well-argued.”

One reviewer notes the paper “asks a set of questions of high relevance to public address scholars.”

Overall Assessment of Convention Planning

I was honored to be able to plan the program for the Division this year, and I believe this year’s program is exceptionally strong not only in terms of quality but also in terms of range. Not surprisingly, Barack Obama and his campaign were heavily emphasized in submissions. But we have a broad array of programs treating issues surrounding sexual orientation, women’s voices and issues, race, visuality and public memory, globalization, dissent, religion, class and labor, war, citizenship and national identity, Native American voices, immigration, international issues, and the Presidency and Congress. The program also includes sessions reflecting on our own practices, including archival research and rhetorical criticism. I applaud submitters this year for the breadth of this program and encourage that breadth for next year’s convention.

As noted, submissions increased dramatically this year, and both the number and high quality of submissions speaks to the intellectual appeal of the Division. Ironically, at the same time, the Division experienced a drop in membership, which tightens our budget for administering awards and servicing the website and may begin to affect the number of slots available for programming if declining membership continues.

I wish to reiterate my thanks to reviewers, the bulk of whom responded diligently and promptly; I experienced only minimal problems with delinquent reviewers. Obtaining an adequate number of respondents with expertise to address topics of papers in created sessions proved challenging this year, in part, because shrinking travel funds at many institutions led some regulars not to commit to attending NCA this year or else commit themselves only to one day if their paper or session was accepted, and I had no way of guaranteeing the timeline of the final schedule. I had to replace a respondent who pulled out after the program was set so had to reshuffle some duties, and a chair and respondent also were dropped from the program for not registering by NCA’s deadline. I encourage everyone who volunteers or agrees to serve as a respondent for Kirt Wilson to view that agreement as a firm obligation.
My experiences with All Academic this year proved to be vastly smoother than has been reported in previous years. Having been a chair of three units on the regional level without an electronic system, I was delighted not to have to keep track of paper submissions, compile and tabulate reviewer data, and type up all of the individual programs. I found the All Academic system to work exceedingly well this year for the most part. The conference call tutorial training for navigating All Academic was exceptional. And this year respondents have been able to download papers directly. The major difficulties I encountered surrounded some confusion over Scholar-to-Scholar programming, the e-mail capabilities, and the transfer process wherein, for example, a planner from another unit could transfer a submission to PAD for review. I particularly want to acknowledge the help of Michelle Randall and Katie Karsnak in the National Office whom I called upon routinely with questions. They were competent, prompt in responding to questions, concerns, or requests, and unfailingly courteous. Similarly, Irene Wang proved prompt and helpful in processing awards materials.

I wish all of you the best for an enriching convention.