

**Sara LaBelle, Ph.D.**

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**Candidate Statement, Eastern Communication Association, Vice President Select Elect**

I am an Associate Professor in the School of Communication at Chapman University, where I serve on the faculty of our undergraduate programs in Communication and Strategic and Corporate Communication, our M.S. program in Health and Strategic Communication, and our Ph.D. program in Communication. I also serve as the Assistant Dean of Academic Programs and Faculty Development and the Director of our Graduate Student Instructor program. As I elaborate upon more below, I have been a member of ECA for the entirety of my academic career, which has provided countless opportunities to me as an educator and scholar. I am truly humbled and honored to be considered for this leadership position. Below I outline in some detail my commitment to ECA, as well as my vision for ECA leadership if awarded this opportunity.

### **Commitment to ECA**

Like so many of us who regularly attend ECA, this conference has a rich personal history for me. I first attended ECA in Baltimore in 2010, where I presented a paper coauthored with Melissa Wanzer. It was at that presentation that I met Keith Weber and Melanie Booth-Butterfield, who would eventually serve on my dissertation committee at West Virginia University. I truly learned how to be an academic and engage in our discipline through ECA. I haven't missed a conference since that first presentation, and in that time I have not only presented my own research but have served as a panel chair, reviewer, and respondent to several interest groups. The majority of my service has been to the Instructional Communication and Health Communication Interest Groups, where I have served as both secretary (Instructional Communication, 2016-2018; Health Communication, 2013, 2014, 2015) and Program Chair (Instructional Communication, 2020; Health Communication, 2015, 2016). I also served as Chair of the Short Course Program for the 2019 conference, and as a member of both legislative assembly and nominating committee. Most recently, I served as the Second Vice President to Jennifer Waldeck as she planned the 2020 conference in Baltimore.

In addition to these service commitments, I have published my work in all three of ECA's publications: *Communication Quarterly*, *Communication Research Reports*, and *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*. In 2019, I was honored to have a paper in *Communication Quarterly* (coauthored with Hannah Ball) selected for the "ECA Article of the Year" Award. I am a member of the editorial boards for both *Communication Quarterly* and *Communication Research Reports*. I regularly submit my work to our annual conference, and I am proud to say that I have had several graduate students from Chapman University present their work at ECA; as a native of Buffalo, NY, I take a lot of pride in showing Californians how awesome the East Coast is!

### **Vision for ECA Leadership**

Of course, the duty of a Vice President Select Elect is to not only appreciate the tradition and history of an association, but to also have a vision for its future. As a leader in ECA, I would

focus my efforts on bringing students from underrepresented communities and backgrounds into our academic community. There is no part of my academic and personal success that is not directly attributable to the incredible mentors and role models that I have had, many of whom are lifelong members of this association. I am a first-generation student, the proud daughter of a goldsmith and an administrative assistant. I was raised to work hard and always do my best, and I've always been acutely aware of how important it is to have a good education. Like so many first-generation students, though, college (and particularly graduate school) were often overwhelming spaces, where the heavy weight of imposter syndrome can convince even the best students that they don't belong.

If I am elected to this position in ECA, I will passionately pursue creating further opportunities for students from marginalized communities to not only engage with the discipline, but to connect with faculty and obtain meaningful mentorship opportunities. I have already been doing this work at my own institution: I am the founding director of the first-generation faculty mentorship program in the School of Communication, I serve as a member of our School's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, on our university's First-Generation Programming Advisory Board, am a registered faculty advocate for first-generation students on campus, and am serving as part of an interdisciplinary team of scholars to bring federal scholarships to support graduate education among underrepresented students at our institution. If there is anything I have learned in these spaces, it is that I have so much to learn from others; I sincerely look forward to hearing your ideas on how to meaningfully and sustainably engage in this work as an organization.

As a leader, I promise to give my best to ECA. I am a determined and highly motivated person, but I understand the importance of seeking mentorship and advice from those with more experience than me. My experiences as a teacher and administrator have given me excellent organizational skills, as well as the ability to lead collaborative teams to success. Perhaps most importantly, I have seen what it takes to plan a conference and lead this association in my role as Second Vice President, and I know that I am prepared and able to meet this challenge. If elected, I will be thrilled to work with each of you and ECA's leadership team to bring continued success to this historic organization.

When I am asked to explain why I continue to travel to ECA each year, despite having lived in California for the past seven years, the answer is simple: This is my home conference. This is the academic association that has mentored and shaped who I am as an academic and given me countless opportunities to challenge myself. I have received support and encouragement from so many of the members of this association, and I would be honored to lead it as the Vice President Select Elect. Thank you for taking the time to read this statement and for your consideration.