**ECA Rhetoric and Public Address Interest Group—Business Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, March 27, 2025, 8:30 AM**

**Buffalo, NY, Hyatt Regency Grand E**

In Attendance: Tim Barney (Chair/2025 Program Planner, University of Richmond), Benjamin Bates (Executive Council Rep, Ohio University), Anne Czerwinski (Secretary, University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg), Gui Caliendo (2026 Program Planner, Carnegie Melon), Abbe Depretis (Executive Council Rep Elect, Carnegie Melon), Cora Farra (Ohio University), Doran Tucker (George Mason University), Maggie Wise (George Mason University), Brent Saindon (Winebrenner Theological Seminary).

Note: I did not send around an attendance sheet, it was 8:30 AM and I neglected to do so, my apologies, but I think the attendance is fairly accurate, our attendance was limited due to the early time frame. However, if you recall anyone else at the meeting, please let me know, and I will add them.

Tim Barney (Chair): Calls the meeting to order at approx. 8:32 AM. He acknowledges that we got a tough timeslot for our business meeting at 8:30 AM, and this early hour likely impacted attendance. Tim passes out a prepared agenda for the meeting. He announces that we are going to discuss planning for next year but first asks those in attendance to go around the room and introduce themselves.

After the introductions, Tim reminds us that all the Rhetoric and Public Address offerings this year are in the Grand E room. He announced the various panels for the interest group: The Top paper panel will be in Grand E at 10:00 right after the business meeting, then tomorrow morning—Friday at 8:30 AM there is panel exploring rhetorical messages in different adaptations of Beetlejuice. At 2:30 Friday, there is a competitive paper panel, entitled, “New Pathways in Rhetoric & Public Address,” and at 8:30 AM on Saturday there is a panel on “works in progress,” and so on.

Tim moves on to discuss the state of our interest group, which he describes as “concerning.” In terms of panel submissions, we receive a strong group of high-quality submissions, but it is a rather small group. He asks: How can we target better to receive more submissions? He states that the interest group is healthy, but we are small. We have the capacity to double the number of panels. Hence, he wants to discuss ideas about how to increase the amount of panel submissions for next year.

Ben: This is not unique to our interest group; many groups have lower numbers. There are department cutbacks across universities, or people choosing to go to NCA or ICA, all which affect participation at ECA. Targeting rhetoric programs would be a useful idea, and personal student networks.

Tim: He pointed out that we often talk about what we want to do as an interest group, but we do not always follow up on it, and he stated that we must get better at this.

Doran: He said he just stumbled into the meeting by chance but sees it as a good opportunity to discuss issues that relate to graduate students and the importance of getting them more involved in ECA.

Anne: Asked how we can better target graduate programs?

Many in attendance then participated in this discussion, offering suggestions such as sending emails to graduate coordinators at various institutions. And various people suggested different universities and colleges such as: Maryland, Geoge Mason, Penn State campuses, Temple, Duquesne, Carnegie Melon, Kent, Bowling Green, Pitt campuses, Cincinnati, West Virginia, and the SUNY system. Although we did not address who will take charge of this endeavor.

Anne: Asked if we were interested in undergraduate submissions as well.

Abbe: Stated that the Undergraduate Scholars Conference (USC) offers the undergraduates funding for ECA, so undergraduates would probably want to first send a submission there, but they could send a second-choice paper to our interest group, and that there is no harm in asking undergraduates to apply.

Ben: Stated that, in fact, he has an undergraduate student (Cora Farra) presenting on the top paper panel at 10:00 after the meeting.

Maggie: We could encourage graduate students to have a panel together, maybe a “work in progress” panel. We could also coordinate with a larger interest group and pick up some overflow from them.

Abbe: Suggests the Instructional Communication interest group, to collaborate with them.

Ben: Suggests the Political Communication interest group as another interest group we could collaborate with.

Tim: Asks if we should continue with the “works in progress” panels? And many in the room responded yes.

Doran: He agreed that it is very useful to have a “works in progress” panel. He said it “lowers the barrier a bit” and makes a submission more doable during busy times.

Abbe: Mentioned that it is also a great opportunity for graduate students to get opinions on their “works in progress” from professors who are not on their dissertation committees. She also suggested that we could sponsor a job panel—"How to network and get a job in rhetoric” for graduate students, and perhaps one for undergraduates, there could be a panel, such as, “What you can do with a degree in rhetoric”?

Maggie: Agreed with this idea and said this could be a good way to target undergraduates to our interest group.

Tim: Let’s move to the report from the Executive Council (EC)

Ben: According to the schedule, Ben is done with EC and Abbe is coming on, so we do not need an election, she will do this position for two years.

Tim: When does her position start?

Ben: Abbe’s position as EC Rep begins Sunday 2025 and ends Thursday 2027. (Note: on ECA website Ben is listed until Thurs 2026)

Tim: What is happening on Executive Council?

Ben: Membership in ECA is stable, we have around 400-450 ECA members, down from our peak of 800, which has impacts on interest groups. Some groups are below the minimum of 25 members, and the Executive Council is asking if these interest groups should continue to be recognized. Ben mentioned Argumentation and Forensics, Interpretation and Performance Studies, Communication Traits, Voices of Diversity, Kenneth Burke Society, and Intercultural Communication as the interest groups with lower enrollment. He mentioned that attendance at business meetings is very low for the Intercultural Communication interest group that it is becoming difficult for them to operate.

Anne: The Kenneth Burke Society now has over 25 members. Many people apply Burkean concepts in their papers, and students use Burke in their poster sessions, yet people don’t check that interest group box.

Ben: Finances for ECA are strong. ECA has $1 million in the bank and had a profit of $50,000 last year. We should still pass the IRS non-profit status, but if we earn too much, we could lose this non-profit status. ECA is always concerned about money, and they don’t appear to want to spend much of what they have. The conference is in Pittsburgh next year and the organization was able to get good deals on the hotel rooms. The rooms are $185/night regardless of the number of people in the room, and only $129/night for students, again no matter how many people are in the room. “Emergence” is the theme for the Pittsburgh conference.

Ben or Tim stated: Paul Carty from Kendall Hunt will be honored in Pittsburgh with a Lifetime membership

Tim: He wants to publicly recognize Eric. C. Miller for the Top paper in our interest group this year, and he will be presenting his paper at the 10:00 panel after this meeting. He will receive a top paper certificate from our interest group.

Gui: For the “works in progress” panel(s) next year, can we consider giving it a name such as “Agora” (a gathering place in ancient Greece, a center of political, social, spiritual, business, aesthetic, and artistic life)—to honor our rhetorical roots? And Gai noted that it’s more discursive; it’s about bringing your ideas to the table. Various people nodded in agreement with this idea.

Tim: We will need a Program Planner for 2027. Tim said he would volunteer again, if necessary, but he wants to spread the wealth around. Gui Caliendo is doing it for Pittsburgh in 2026. ECA will be in Falls Church, Virginia in 2027, is anyone interested in being a program planner for 2027? No one volunteered. Tim said it is okay if no one wants to step up, he could possibly ask Val Schrader if she is interested, or he is willing to do it again. Or, he added—we could have an email vote, hold an election over email about this.

Abbe: Stated that was a great idea.

Tim: And lots of people are probably not at the meeting because of the early 8:30 AM timeslot. And he will also ask in the email if members want to be a reviewer for the next conference.

Ben: If you didn’t check the box for our interest group in your ECA registration, let him know if you would like to be a reviewer because otherwise you won’t receive the email about this.

Anne: I could only check one interest group box when I registered, not three, and my husband had the same problem. We could have lower membership because of this. (Note: I also brought this issue up with Stacey Smulowitz and Jordan Atkinson at the General Business Meeting on Saturday night, and they are looking into this. Jordan noticed that many members only had one interest group listed, and he found this odd. This could account for our lower membership, as well as lower memberships for other groups.)

Tim: Any ideas for Pittsburgh panels?

Abbe: Jonathan Stern, one of her professors in graduate school, passed away—there could be a panel honoring his work. He mostly did Mass Comm, but a few different interest groups could spotlight his work at the Pittsburgh conference.

Gui: The department at the University of Pittsburgh is very different now, very media focused, new media/virtual reality-focused, that type of panel might interest them, and it ties nicely into the “emergence” theme.

Tim: And AI-themed panels

Gui: Duquesne is philosophy-focused, any kind of focus on that in our call could interest them

Tim: Asked Gui if he can attend the Program Planners meeting in Buffalo, and he said yes, as he is the planner for the 2026 Pittsburgh conference.

Tim: It was an absolute pleasure to see all of you. We want to grow as an interest group, please come and support our panels.

Gui: Maybe we could also be open to quantitative researchers. Some people do both rhetoric and quantitative analysis, it could help draw more people in and help us to grow. And more and more departments are interested in issues of women’s studies too; we could do something with this topic as well.

Tim: Good ideas. Thank you for attending, and hope to see you at the top paper panel.

Meeting adjourned at approx. 9:20. If someone has the exact time, let me know, I believe this is close to the end time.

Minutes prepared by Anne Czerwinski, Secretary.