

Interviewee: Jacqueline Jones Royster [R]

Interviewer: Brittany Knutson [K]

Transcriber: Elizabeth McGhee Williams

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Transcript

K: My name is Brittany Knutson, and I'm here with Jacqueline Royster. I'll just start with the first question. When did you first join RSA?

R: I've been thinking about that question, and the fact of the matter is that I don't really remember when I first joined. I think my first conference was 1994. It might have been 1996, but I think it was 1994 because one of the things from having been here with so much talk about 50 years is that my starting with RSA was also tied to my participation in ARS—the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies—because I was active in other organizations before becoming active in RSA.

K: I had never heard of ARS.

R: Yeah. It was a short-lived interrogation of who we were in time. So it wasn't designed to go forward. But I was a part of that process.

K: Do you remember how you heard about RSA?

R: Yeah, I knew about RSA already. It's just that I hadn't had time to join another organization. I was already in 4Cs,¹ NCTE,² MLA,³ NWSA,⁴ and NCA.⁵ I just didn't have time to think about another one. And then I changed jobs and that gave me a little bit more of a window and a little bit different configuration of support. And in my leadership of the other organizations—leadership activities in the other organizations—it put me in a place to be with ARS in a way that said, "Okay, let me check out RSA now that I have a little bit more time in my schedule."

K: Sure. That's great. How would you describe the organization when you first joined?

R: Hmm. Well the thing that struck me about the organization was that it was smaller. And so you could have different qualities of conversation because you could engage with people a little bit more intimately. Instead of a conference of 3,000, there was a conference of 400, 500. Which is a different level of engagement. So I liked that. It was far more *intradisciplinary*. I've been thinking about that one. I don't know if it's *interdisciplinary*, but it's certainly *intradisciplinary* in that people who cared about

¹ Conference on College Composition and Communication.

² National Council of Teachers of English.

³ Modern Language Association.

⁴ National Women's Studies Association.

⁵ National Communication Association.

rhetoric came from various types of disciplines, and I really liked that. So those were the two things that struck me as, "Oh, I need to come to this more often."

K: Sure, sure. Do you remember some of the people that you met when you first started coming to RSA?

R: I can't say that they were new to me because a lot of us were in other organizations. So I had met many of the people whose work I came to know through RSA in a different way. And that was appealing to me. And then of course there were new people. But that was a while ago, so I don't exactly remember who was in that first cohort of people, who were folks I didn't know. Because I was already going to NCA occasionally, and of course people in NCTE and 4Cs I already knew. And then there was that group of us who were wanting to bring more feminist studies to rhetorical studies, and I knew those people. So I don't exactly remember who was actually new in that configuration, say from economics, or from law, or something like that.

K: Sure. What was RSA doing when you first joined? So what were some of the major goals and projects?

R: Hmm. For me, what I noticed that it was doing was being more inclusive of contemporary work. 'Cause as you know, rhetorical studies is a very traditional, very white guy kind of organization.

K: [chuckles]

R: And the fact that I was even encouraged to come was saying that it was a new day. 'Cause my work was definitely not that.

[simultaneous laughter]

R: Yeah. So that was what was evident to me: that they were rather embracing of rhetoric having questions other than the ones that had been dealt with as rhetorical questions for eons.

K: Did you see that reflected in the program or the people that you met?

[04:58]

R: A little bit of both, because I think the very first time I came to RSA, I was giving either a featured talk or a keynote. So the fact that I was on the program said that the program must be changing if they invited me to be on it. And of course the people were talking about things in a more focused way on language and rhetoric that I really was welcoming, having grown up as a person who came to this arena through linguistics.

K: Great. What are your most important or prominent memories of RSA?

R: Hmm. I think that my best memories are of the larger gatherings, like the keynote speakers, the featured speakers, the long panels, things like that, where these crosscutting perspectives on rhetorical enterprises were part of the normal conversations. I liked those very much.

K: I like the keynotes too. That's my favorite part.

R: Yeah.

K: How has the organization changed through the time that you've been a part of it?

R: Well I think the caring about members is something that I was very surprised by. Because it's not just about the organization itself, at a professional organization. It's about the people who constitute the organization. So there is a caring for where you are in the arc of your career. There is a caring about the vision that you are creating of yourself as you're making your professional identity. And so I think that is a growing momentum that is exemplified probably best by the institutes, and not just the conference.

K: This is sort of along the same lines, but what do you think RSA will do in the coming years?

R: Oh, that's a great question. I think there is no end to it because we have a cohort of people like yourself who are bringing a level of energy to RSA, and I'm just wanting to know, so, "What are they thinking? What do they want to do?" And I think that we're in a spot now, in our history as an organization, that is willing to just say, "Okay, let's see what they want to do, how they want to do it." And be as supportive as we can be. And to me, that says that it's not about knowing where the next step is, as knowing that there will be next steps. And that those steps will be defined and enriched by the experience of the people who are coming into the organization now and becoming the new leadership of it.

K: Sure. What are your hopes for the organization's future?

R: That it won't be—well I should start again, just in case you want to really have a different kind of cut on this. My hopes for RSA are that we will continue not to be constrained by what the past has been. That we will be open to rhetorical enterprises as living enterprises that will evolve, that will shift and change, that will give us the opportunity to engage with current circumstances in very dynamic ways. And I really have that as a primary hope. And the second piece of that would be that we would continue to pay attention to the nourishing of the people who do that work 'cause it's hard work. And the people who do it need to have some sense of being cared about and appreciated for the kind of energy that's going into what is going on and the performance of that work.

K: Alright. That's all the questions I have for you.

R: Oh, wonderful.

K: But if you have anything you would like to add?

R: No, that's good. That's good. That works. I appreciate being asked, and I certainly appreciate your kindness in having this conversation with me.

K: Well I appreciate you sharing. I've enjoyed hearing the stories that people bring into this room.