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A Living Rhetorical Enterprise: The RSA Oral History Initiative

Eric Detweiler and Elizabeth McGhee Williams

This essay introduces the archive created by the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA)'s Oral History Initiative. The archive consists of 21 audio interviews recorded at the 2018 RSA conference, transcripts of those interviews, and miscellaneous supplementary materials. Recorded on the occasion of RSA's fiftieth anniversary, the interviews feature long-time RSA members, past and present officers and board members, and those who were otherwise a part of key moments in the society's history. The essay's authors explore the contents of the interviews, emphasizing three key terms frequently invoked by the interviewees themselves: interdisciplinarity, intimacy, and inclusivity. The authors also provide instructions for accessing the archival materials and invite readers to make use of them.

Keywords: archives, disciplinary history, inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, oral history

Over the course of three days in 2018, in the quiet recesses of a third-floor lobby and a corner meeting room at the Hilton Minneapolis, rhetorical history was made. More specifically, in tandem with the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA)'s biennial conference and fiftieth anniversary, the recesses and room in question played host to the RSA Oral History Initiative (OHI). Over three days, a team of volunteers audio-recorded interviews with 25 long-time RSA members,¹ most of whom have been regularly involved in

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¹The interviewees were Fred Antczak, David Blakesley, Gregory Clark, Richard Enos, Michael Feehan, S. Michael Halloran, Gerard Hauser, Cynthia Haynes, Janice Lauer Rice, Andrea Lunsford, Steven Mailloux, Carolyn Miller, Lester Olson, Krista Ratcliffe, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Jack Selzer, Jane Sutton, Sue Wells, Hui Wu, and David Zarefsky, as well as a group of rhetoricians who participated in the first RSA summer institute in 2005: René De los Santos, Jessica Enoch, Jenn Fishman, Elizabeth Kimball, and Scott Wible. The interviewers and proctors for the initiative were Whitney Jordan Adams, Sweta Baniya, Amy Charron, Derek Handley, Ben Harley, Justin Hatch, Laura Jones, Jennifer Juszkievicz, Emily Katseanes, Brittany Knutson, Caroline Koons, Jennifer Malkowski, Eda Ozyesilpinar, Heather Palmer, Sarah Riddick, Peter Simonson, Emily Smith, Jason Tham, and Rick Wysocki. Copious thanks for the generosity, flexibility, and candor of everyone involved. Thanks also to Kirt Wilson for reserving the meeting room in which most of the interviews were conducted and to Middle Tennessee State University's Albert Gore Research Center for providing some of the recording equipment used for the initiative.

the organization since the late 1960s and early '70s, served as officers and board members at pivotal moments in its history, or both.

“Rhetorical history was made” may sound like an oddly grand phrase to describe an ad hoc oral history project conducted at a regularly scheduled meeting of a professional organization. However, we have particular reasons for juxtaposing such a phrase with a workaday description of the spaces in which the initiative unfolded. As documented in the collected interviews, such juxtapositions are central to what RSA has been and what it has become, including the inroads it has made in reestablishing rhetoric as a meaningful component of both the curricula of contemporary universities and the scholarly landscapes of English studies, communication studies, and various interrelated fields. That is, while RSA has played a significant role in shaping the recent history of rhetoric as a practice and an academic field, that role frequently grew out of intimate conversations, do-it-yourself newsletters, informal mentoring networks, burgeoning friendships, and fledgling conferences in Arlington, Texas. And, in a similar spirit, the tangible ways in which the OHI “made” rhetorical history—crafting an archive of materials documenting RSA’s first fifty years—happened through a series of small-scale collaborations and one-on-one interviews, through a suitcase full of handheld digital audio recorders, and through the hours of work that went into transcribing the audio files into written documents.

We begin by emphasizing the interwoven quality of the historical and the everyday because of resonances with many of the aspirations, challenges, and tensions discussed by the interviewees themselves. As a case in point, consider a few words from Jacqueline Jones Royster’s OHI interview. Asked about her hopes for RSA’s future, Royster responds, “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.” The OHI and the ongoing history of RSA itself are living and rhetorical enterprises—unsettled and dynamic convergences of collaboration, contention, critique, and care. This piece is meant to introduce and invite others to engage with the OHI interviews in ways that enliven rather than constrain the past, present, and future of RSA and of rhetoric more broadly. The digital archive of the interviews, interview transcripts, and supplementary materials is now accessible at <http://RhetEric.org/oralhistory/>. When the archive is moved to its permanent home, the move will be announced in *RSQ* and on the RSA Facebook page. This archive is not offered as a simple paean or encomium to the history of RSA. While the interviews—which in many ways echo and expand on points raised in S. Michael Halloran’s recent “anecdotal history” of RSA—document the painstaking, nurturing work of people without whom rhetoric’s place in contemporary pedagogy and scholarship would look quite different, the interviewees also describe the magnitude of internal and external work still to be done. In what follows, we focus on three key components and challenges of RSA’s history and trajectory: interdisciplinarity, intimacy, and inclusivity.

Before getting to those three issues, a quick note regarding our involvement in this project: Eric Detweiler was the project coordinator for the OHI. At the invitation of RSA officers and board members, he composed the calls for interviewees and interviewers, scheduled and managed the on-the-ground process of recording the interviews at the conference, and helped archive the interviews afterward.² Elizabeth McGhee Williams spent much of the past year transcribing the interviews to make them more readily accessible, readable, and searchable.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations throughout the rest of this piece are from OHI interviews.

Interdisciplinarity

Across the interviews, one of the most remarked-on aspects of RSA's work was its bringing together of rhetoricians in English studies and communication studies. Multiple interviewees linked the formation of RSA to the marginalization of rhetoric within both English and communication departments and, to some extent, within the narrower confines of the field of rhetoric and composition.³ The first RSA meeting, an informal affair, occurred during the 1968 Conference on College Composition and Communication, or CCCC (Gunn and Davis 2; Halloran 235–36), prompted by a sense that rhetoric's presence at CCCC was sufficiently diffuse that interested scholars needed a dedicated venue in which to gather, compare notes, and share reading lists and research projects. With a few notable exceptions—including Royster, who describes RSA as "*intradisciplinary*"—interviewees described the society's subsequent trajectory as interdisciplinary. In his OHI interview, Halloran emphasizes that the society set an early goal of being welcoming to scholars from a variety of fields: "I would say their [i.e., RSA leadership's] major project was bringing together a coherent and yet not restrictive, an intellectually substantial, field of study. Interdisciplinary. And I think it's been highly successful with that. When you look around

²For the interview questions, see the Appendix. More technical details of the project are available in the digital archive.

³On the marginalization of rhetoric in twentieth-century American universities, see Berlin; Crowley, *Composition*; Goggin; Skinnell. On the English studies side of things, rhetoric and composition—now widely referred to as "rhetoric and writing studies"—has often played the upstart, disrespected counterpart to the more prestigious, supposedly established study of literature. And even within the heading "rhetoric and composition," scholars like Crowley have argued that composition-centered approaches to the teaching of writing have boxed out more rhetorical approaches (Crowley, "Composition"). Meanwhile, in "Epistemological Movements in Communication," Anderson and Middleton analyze "one hundred years of empirical and rhetorical/critical scholarship in communication" (82). Unlike many disciplinary histories of English studies, Anderson and Middleton do not point to rhetoric as a clear underdog in communication studies' disciplinary landscape. However, the OHI interviews demonstrate a feeling that, from the start, RSA was making space for rhetorically oriented communication scholars as their discipline became increasingly focused on empirical methodologies and subfields. This feeling may have intensified when the Speech Communication Association was renamed the National Communication Association in 1997 (Gunn and Dance 74), a change Antczak discusses in his OHI interview and Gunn and Dance explore in detail in "The Silencing of Speech in the Late Twentieth Century."

here [i.e., the 2018 conference] and there are people from quite a variety of disciplines, I would say that was its major project.” Janice Lauer Rice notes that, early on, RSA was particularly invested in creating space for rhetoricians in English and communication, especially as communication studies’ turn toward empirical research left some rhetoricians feeling less sure of their place in the field (see also Gunn and Dance). Or, as Fred Antczak puts it, “rhetoricians formed a bond from different kinds of common suffering.” That said, he goes on to note that the disciplinary combination was not seamless: in the early days of RSA, most communication studies scholars and English studies scholars were not reading each other’s work, and “it was easy to tell who were the English folks and who were the communication folks.”

Bringing together English and communication scholars continued to be a major goal and challenge as the organization progressed, although English scholars often constituted a greater share of its leadership and membership. Carolyn Miller pursued such interdisciplinarity during her tenure as president of RSA, which ran from 1996–1998:

If I can make any claim to having made a difference in the organization. ... I was interested in bringing more NCA [National Communication Association] members in. I knew a lot of rhetorical studies was going on in communication departments because of my ... boundary-straddling positionality. And I just thought, “Where are the NCA people?” Because most of the people on the board when I served on the board [from 1990–1994] were from English departments.⁴

Miller points to the 1996 RSA conference in Tucson, Arizona, as “the beginning of a turning point” in making the organization more “bi-departmental.” The conference’s theme was the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black’s 1971 report on NCA’s National Developmental Project on Rhetoric, and Miller credits that theme with drawing an especially high number of communication studies scholars to the conference.

RSA’s interdisciplinary background and aspirations shaped the organization’s scope in significant ways. Multiple interviewees noted that, unlike professional societies tied to more formalized disciplines or departments, RSA did not have to serve as a site for certain career-focused activities, particularly interviews for faculty positions. As Gregory D. Clark, president of RSA at the time of the 2018 conference, puts it, “Our first and foremost goal is to perpetuate ... rhetoric as a field of study and an intellectual discipline that may not be in most campuses designated by a department. So it’s an interdiscipline. But the thing that we are

⁴Miller goes on to note that the RSA Constitution has always had measures in place to balance the disciplinary affiliations of the organization’s leadership, but that these measures were not always observed in earlier days (see also “RSA Constitution”; Skinnell and Goggin 352).

most emotionally attached to is the idea of mentoring.” That is, while RSA has played and continues to play a role in the professional development of graduate students and faculty members, it has often focused on forms of professionalization that are not as tied to the shape and structure of university departments or degree programs as, say, the Modern Language Association or NCA. Sue Wells, who began attending the conference in the 1980s, elaborates on this distinction. For her, RSA

was disciplinary rather than professional. So it wasn’t a place where you hired, it wasn’t a place where you looked for a job, it wasn’t a place where you were entirely in the company of other English department folk who had similar problems that you would be drawn into talking about. This is a place where you would go to one session and you would hear about, “We have discovered a fourth scroll of Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ whatever,” and then you’d go to the next session and you’d hear a talk about black women preachers and ... epideictic in a Midwestern city. And both talks would be really, really good.

The interdisciplinary aspect of the organization is also discussed in the OHI roundtable featuring five scholars who participated in the first RSA institute, held at Kent State University in 2005: René De los Santos, Jessica Enoch, Jenn Fishman, Elizabeth Kimball, and Scott Wible. (In his interview, Jack Selzer describes the institute as “RSA’s greatest invention.”) While most members of the roundtable come from backgrounds in English, they recall the first institute as being balanced between rhetoricians in English and in communication studies. Interestingly, many members of the roundtable describe themselves as coming from disciplines or subdisciplines outside of rhetoric—particularly composition studies and education—but finding a kind of disciplinary home within rhetorical studies via the institute. In reflecting on how the theme of that first institute, *The History of Rhetoric as Pedagogy*, continues to inform their research and teaching, the participants mark what may be inflection points in the disciplinary state of rhetoric. For example, Elizabeth Kimball notes that while rhetorically focused writing majors were “unheard of at the time [i.e., 2005],” they are now a key site within which she engages rhetoric as a pedagogical and scholarly framework. This growing role of rhetoric in pre-graduate education is something pointed out and advocated for by other interviewees as well. Krista Ratcliffe, who served as president of RSA from 2012 to 2013, believes the society should have a role in defining how rhetoric gets taught at elementary, junior high, and high school levels: “Rhetoric should not be something that you [only] learn when you are a graduate student or an advanced undergraduate.” In short, rhetoric is beginning to accrue some of the traditional markers of an academic discipline—such as undergraduate degree programs—even as many members of RSA continue to perceive it as an interdisciplinary organization.

The shifting, and arguably crystallizing, terrain of rhetoric circa 2018 throws comments about RSA's interdisciplinary history into visible, if not yet stark, relief. As of now, to what extent is rhetoric still an interdiscipline and/or a discipline in its own right? As Antczak notes, "rhetoric is now known and respected in a way I was not aware of it being in the early '90s." The last couple of decades have seen the formation of numerous university entities that include "rhetoric" in their names: professional writing and rhetoric majors, rhetoric and writing departments, technical communication and rhetoric programs, and so on. Assuming such programs and departments continue to grow and proliferate, hiring faculty from communication studies, English studies, and other proximate fields, how might RSA's mission and the shape of rhetoric begin to change? To what extent might this lead new interdisciplines to establish new organizations outside of RSA, or bring new disciplinary perspectives to RSA?⁵ In what ways might the study and teaching of rhetoric consolidate and fragment within and beyond the organization? In terms of the OHI, how might rhetoric's current and future disciplinary trajectories lead us to reassess the interdisciplinary work of RSA's first fifty years?

And finally, it's worth making one more interdisciplinary clarification. While many of the interviewees emphasized communication studies and English studies as RSA's key co-disciplines, those have never been the only fields represented. Multiple interviewees discuss the work of George Yoos, whose disciplinary background was in philosophy (see also Gunn and Davis 4; Halloran 235; Skinnell and Goggin 352–53), and scholars from fields like linguistics and sociology are also mentioned as having made significant contributions to the organization. Even if, in retrospect, RSA's efforts will have played a role in making rhetoric a discipline in the institutionalized sense of the term, it will be a discipline informed by a variety of perspectives, not just bi- but polydisciplinary. And it may well be that the list of disciplinary perspectives continues to expand, as Steve Mailloux hopes in his interview: "I wish there were more anthropologists, political scientists—[scholars of] psychology, sociology, philosophy, literature—that were coming to RSA. That we could become even more interdisciplinary."⁶

Intimacy

RSA's role in the growth of rhetoric's profile—disciplinary and interdisciplinary, scholarly and pedagogical—has been attended by another, more readily quantifiable form of growth: the number of scholars who are members of the society and attend its events. The organization's growth was a point of pride, concern, and ambivalence

⁵Here we might consider the American Society for the History of Rhetoric, the International Society for the History of Rhetoric, and the Association for the Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine, all of which held symposia in conjunction with the 2018 conference.

⁶For more on Mailloux's points, see his *Disciplinary Identities: Rhetorical Paths of English, Speech, and Composition*.

for interviewees, many of whom used variations of a particular word to describe the atmosphere of RSA's formative decades: intimate.

Reflecting on her experiences at early RSA conferences, Royster remembers, "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 3000, there was a conference of 400–500." Royster then remarks on the distinct ways in which the organization cares for its members: "It's not just about the organization itself. ... 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 are making your professional identity." Similarly, Richard Leo Enos recalls that RSA initially selected "the name 'society' with deliberate intent, as a kind of a group of friends. ... And when these people started this, they really were friends. Their common denominator was rhetoric. But they really enjoyed each other's company, and they selected that term on purpose." Enos glosses this as "the sort of intimate, friendly nature that got this thing going." Jack Selzer describes RSA, when he first joined, as a "souped-up club." He clarifies, "I don't mean 'club' in a pejorative way at all." Rather, RSA was a club in the sense that "that's where your friends are made, so the intimacy is there."

Jane Sutton recalls that the plenary panel format of the conferences in the 1980s (which put all attendees in the same room) lent the proceedings "a sense of intimacy and urgency." On a related note, Gerard Hauser, who joined in the early 1970s, was impressed by the sheer rate of panel attendance at RSA:

At first, when I really attended in earnest, what I noticed was that people attended panels. When panels started, there weren't a lot of people in the halls. There weren't a lot of people in the lobby. There weren't a lot of people in the bar. People were in the rooms listening to papers, so this was very different from what I was experiencing at the huge meetings of NCA. There were a lot of panels to choose from, so my areas of interest were being addressed almost every hour.

Cynthia Haynes links the intimacy of the organization's early days to the relatively regional quality of the conferences organized by Charles Kneupper in Arlington, Texas. Emphasizing RSA's Texas roots, Haynes tells the story of mailing James Berlin, then a faculty member at Purdue University, the ingredients to make tacos after a group of Texas-based rhetoricians took him out for Mexican food during one of the Arlington conferences. Haynes notes that faculty members, graduate students, and alumni from The University of Texas at Arlington were complemented by

Winifred Horner from TCU [Texas Christian University], and those folks from the TCU crowd, which was just next to Fort Worth and Arlington. ... So in the beginning it was just this very intimate group of graduate students of these people [i.e., Berlin, Horner, and UT-Arlington faculty like Victor J. Vitanza and

C. Jan Swearingen] and the scholars and rhetoricians that just formed a real cohesive grounding and foundation.⁷

As RSA has grown, its capacity for intimacy has become a matter of concern while remaining a goal of the organization. Clark recalls an era when the RSA financials were nothing more than a checkbook in then-Executive Director Halloran's back pocket, at which time the organization was primarily focused on sustaining the conference and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. Even as the organization began to grow substantially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Clark notes, "we recognized we were not going to become NCA, we were not going to become CCCC—which are large corporations, really. But we wanted to be able to do more things to perpetuate the study of rhetoric." Those things included establishing the summer institute as well as joining the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS).⁸ Clark describes how and why, as the organization grew and its finances became more complex, RSA incorporated and gained 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. "Now," he says, "we're at the point where sometimes people complain ... we're institutionalizing. And we *are* institutionalizing. We have to in order to handle the complexity of what we do." Clark ventures a comparison: it's like "we're a garage band of neighbors that's become a record company." In short, RSA is "not the innocent group anymore." After describing the important role mentorship from senior scholars at RSA played in his own professional development, Clark mentions that a number of attendees have expressed concern that the conferences have gotten too big "because that intimacy, they think, is lost"—specifically, the intimacy that often accompanies the informal mentorship a smaller organization can foster between senior and junior scholars. That is what leads Clark to claim, per an earlier quotation, that while the leadership's primary goal may still be to perpetuate and strengthen the study of rhetoric, they are most "emotionally attached" to providing structured opportunities that "perpetuate ... intimacy" via mentorship and engagement between graduate students and more established scholars in the field.

Other interviewees frame the relation between size and intimacy in assorted ways. Antczak, for instance, links matters of intimacy back to matters of disciplinarity: "it's possible for rhetoric to become everything," and in the process of covering larger swaths of intellectual terrain, to get so big that it "unravels tighter bonds," leading to a "loss of intimacy" within RSA. But one particularly noteworthy frame, which will lead us to our final key term, is the relationship between intimacy and inclusivity. For instance, when asked about his vision for the future of the society, Enos responds as follows: "Well, I want us always to be welcoming and inclusive. But I don't want to

⁷Haynes also mentions Kathleen Welch and Susan Jarratt as noteworthy attendants of the Arlington conferences.

⁸In her OHI interview, Andrea Lunsford discusses the motivations behind the latter effort: "Membership in ACLS is instrumental in terms of getting grants. So rhetoric was not recognized as a field of study on many grant applications. ... But getting into the ACLS allowed us to become, in some ways, a category."

lose—and I mean this in the most positive way—the sort of intimate, friendly nature that got this thing going. So we have to really be careful we don't just turn into an organization, we don't just become this bureaucracy. That we keep this comradery. That's the biggest, single thing." Clark notes related issues faced by RSA's leadership as they have tried to keep the society's infrastructure on pace with its growth: "We'd say, 'Well, we need to stop growing,' and then somebody else would say, 'Okay, who are we going to reject from the conference, and are we going to make the conference more exclusive?' There are aspirational problems with that—we want to be inclusive ... but there are also practical problems" related to attracting the critical mass of attendees needed to do things like book certain conference venues.

But framing aside, the general sense seems to be that RSA's growth, even if it stabilizes in the coming years, has affected the kinds of intimacy afforded by the conference, and that intimacy and inclusivity exist in a delicate balance. But inclusivity deserves to be addressed in its own right.

Inclusivity

Let us begin the section on our third and final key term with a litany of quotations from OHI interviewees:

Fred Antczak: Rhetoric is "an extraordinarily white discipline."

Greg Clark: "The organization, in the first few years of my involvement, was predominantly male, almost exclusively white."

Andrea Lunsford: "At one point, maybe in the late '80s, Kathleen [Welch] said about RSA, 'We are so white that we appear to be a blizzard.' And I think that's still too true—that we are too white."

Krista Ratcliffe, describing what RSA was like when she first joined: "Well, it was very male and very white."

Jacqueline Jones Royster: "[R]hetorical studies is a very traditional, very white guy kind of organization."

Jack Selzer: "I think we have not been as successful as we'd like at getting ... a more diverse membership. ... There's no way we're where we want to be in that dimension."

Again and again and again, whether reflecting on the organization's history, commenting on its present state, or stating their expectations and hopes for its future, OHI interviewees made three interrelated points: First, it is undeniable that a diverse array of scholars have already made and are continuing to make indispensable, indelible contributions to the field of rhetoric, and a diverse, inclusive membership must be part of the organization's future. Second, the organization has become more diverse and inclusive in recent years, with its membership including a growing number of women; scholars of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer scholars; and international scholars. And

third, in terms of the people who attend and feel welcome at RSA, as well as the rhetorical traditions and phenomena presented on at the conference, the organization has not come close to doing enough to get beyond its predominantly white, male history.

In her interview, Andrea Lunsford gets at the issue from a variety of angles. Lunsford, who pursued a PhD despite discouragement from “my all-white male advisors who told me I should go home and have babies,” describes the importance of the RSA’s *Newsletter*, which went on to become *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. Throughout the 1970s, the newsletter “served a huge bibliographic function.” And yet, Lunsford notes,

scholarship in those early days, both on the composition side and the rhetoric side, was, to my mind, still pretty limited. I was all for the revival of classical rhetoric. I threw myself into that. I bought into the story of rhetoric as having begun in ancient Greece and moved onto Rome. ... And it wasn’t until the ’80s that I started to question that particular narrative.⁹

Lunsford argues that when RSA was just beginning, the classical rhetorical tradition had been largely sidelined in the teaching of writing, “So there was a very important need to recover that classical tradition and reinstate it.” But their focus on this recovery work kept many rhetoricians from asking, “Wait a minute, is this story of classical rhetoric that we’ve been telling ourselves for lo these many years—is that the only way to tell the story of rhetoric?” And I think that women, women of color, men of color started to really push on the boundaries.”¹⁰ Lunsford points to composition studies as a related field that engaged in such boundary-pushing more quickly, with scholars like Mina Shaughnessy, Geneva Smitherman, and Janet Emig demonstrating and arguing that, in the context of composition studies’ pedagogically oriented research, “we need to think about not just white, male students at Harvard, but about all students.” For Lunsford, then, the question of a field’s inclusivity is tied both to who is conducting research in the field and who is represented in that research. Moreover, her account of the intertwined histories of composition studies and rhetorical studies brings us back to questions of disciplinarity—specifically, what rhetorical studies might be able to

⁹On the urgency of challenging histories of rhetoric that privilege narratives of “Western civilization,” which can be disturbingly consonant with narratives forwarded by white supremacists, see Atwill and Portz. Atwill and Portz question the depiction of “Greeks” as a “unitary category,” instead emphasizing the diversity and “complexity of Mediterranean cultures” (180). They go on to ask, “What if diversifying histories of rhetoric also entails ‘unwriting’ narratives of Western civilization and extricating canonical figures from their plots?” (187). For similar work in classics, see Bernal; Zuckerberg.

¹⁰*The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies* documents many of the ways in which rhetorical scholarship has moved beyond the singular Greco-Roman tradition that dominated rhetoric’s initial reemergence in the late twentieth century. See Gaillet and Tasker; Hum and Lyon; Ronald; Sutherland. See also Agnew et al.

learn from adjacent disciplines or subdisciplines taking other approaches to matters of diversity and inclusivity.

Lunsford's and other interviewees' comments are rendered more pressing by recent events in communication studies. Recently, communication scholars have documented and deliberated about the over-representation of white male scholars in such arenas as citations in the field's journals and NCA's Distinguished Scholars (Chakravartty et al.; Dutta; "Statements"). In June 2019, debates over the latter issue led RSA's president and board of directors to release a "Statement on Issues Related to Inclusion and Equity in Communication and Rhetoric." Allow us to highlight a few lines from that statement:

This is an important moment for RSA's officers and members to consider their own institutional practices and take ownership of a process that addresses the lack of inclusion and equity that exists across multiple levels of the Society and the manner in which power and privilege continue their exclusionary work. For example, the RSA Fellows are, much like the Distinguished Fellows of NCA, disproportionately white and male. Ensuring that an academic association's awards reflect not only exemplary scholarship and teaching but also the plurality of its membership is an aim that every association must pursue.

The statement goes on to quote a strategic assessment conducted by Kendall Phillips, RSA's immediate past president as of the 2018 conference:

he reported that "some members see the association as unwelcoming. Specific barriers cited by members in this anonymous survey include race, gender, sexual orientation, and employment status. ... Some characterized RSA as 'cliquish,' too focused on 'big R1 institutions' and too dominated by older white men." ("Statement on Issues")

Phillips himself emphasized the importance of addressing such issues in his remarks at the 2018 conference:

Inclusiveness is a crucial value—to invite others, those who are like us but also those who are different, into our association. But inclusiveness may carry an assumption that we are bringing others into our structure—including them in an association that continues to operate as it always has. Perhaps we need to push this language—and its assumptions—a bit. Perhaps in addition to being inclusive, RSA also needs to be expansive. To do more than invite those from different backgrounds, traditions, or orientations into our association but to clear space for them to build the association anew. In this articulation of our values, it is our responsibility to not only be welcoming and hospitable to those who come next, but to actively work to push open opportunities for them to make something new, different, and hopefully challenging and provocative.

In light of the “Statement on Issues,” the findings of the strategic assessment, and Phillips’s remarks, the OHI interviews prompt questions about how RSA has balanced and will continue to balance inclusivity and intimacy as key values. Rhetoricians are no strangers to questioning simplistic binaries, so it should be obvious that intimacy and inclusivity are not simply opposed to each other. But allowing the perception that there sometimes exists a tension between the two, what work must happen to keep one from cancelling out the other? After all, many OHI interviewees raise well-taken points about the ways in which RSA’s growth could diminish its intimacy. Lester Olson, for example, notes,

I’m not one of those “bigger is better” sort of people. I kind of like a mid-sized conference or a smaller conference because you can actually find people and chat with them and sit down. . . . I’ve seen the really large conferences and they get to a certain point where it becomes highly impersonal. Sometimes . . . [a large conference] has an almost corporate feel where it’s about . . . power in the larger culture, concerns about raising funds for the sake of having lots of funds rather than [for the benefit of members and conference attendees].

It is worth noting the risk that a conference or organization can grow larger in a manner that, as Olson suggests, alienates it from the needs of its members and puts a disproportionate emphasis on having deep pockets for the sake of having deep pockets. Moreover, RSA’s intimate history has not solely benefitted white male scholars. Hui Wu, for example, discusses the significance of Winifred Bryan Horner’s mentorship for a number of female scholars associated with RSA. Jack Selzer mentions the important work of RSA’s gender equity task force, led by Cheryl Geisler.

Informal acts of mentorship—and even more formalized initiatives and task forces—are often set aside when the history of the discipline is told. Even though scholars who study and write about the disciplinary history of rhetorical studies discuss such things in articles and books, graduate students and others new to rhetoric are often introduced to the field as a series of landmark works of scholarship, not the relationships, committee work, and commonplace acts of networking that have shaped it. And yet such things *have* irrevocably shaped it. As demonstrated by the anecdotes and memories shared in the OHI, as well as the structure of the OHI itself, RSA’s history and future are shaped not only—probably not even primarily—by high-profile keynotes, bold proclamations, and well-deserved semicentennial celebrations. Its history and future are shaped as much by fleeting conversations between panels, by acts of mentorship that can interrupt and support traditional networks of power, by relatively small-scale but labor-intensive initiatives left out of the master narrative five, ten, or fifty years down the line. The OHI was one such initiative—a “living enterprise,” in Royster’s words, meant to lend more permanence and call more attention to similar enterprises from across RSA’s first fifty years. Among other things, we hope the diverse stories preserved by the OHI will help scholars invested in rhetoric maintain an inclusive

organization by supporting the kind of “narrative justice” Lunsford discusses in her OHI interview: “I want our mission to be about, first of all, interrogating our own story. What is the narrative that we are telling about rhetoric? Is it one that really encapsulates our highest and deepest values? And then to work on analyzing those singular stories, those master narratives, that are holding people hostage and to create other stories to displace them.” Organizational development happens through the work of the Equity and Diversity Committee mentioned in the RSA leadership’s statement. Organizational development happens through the kinds of everyday, potentially ephemeral “micro-activism” recently articulated by rhetoric scholar Anjali Vats (@raceip).

Organizational development may also happen by taking the work of the organization and of rhetoric into other spheres—by granting rhetoric “more political force,” as Janice Lauer Rice puts it. Commenting on the political climate circa 2018, Krista Ratcliffe notes, “You’ve got to be able to disagree and still work together. And I think that’s been lost a little bit. Not in the local communities—I think that happens more. But at the national level for certain, it’s become a dominant trope to vilify. And I think one way to prevent that from happening is to make rhetoric more visible in the educational system.” David Blakesley’s interview echoes Ratcliffe’s: he hopes RSA can help “a wider public understand the importance of rhetoric for dealing with political problems, cultural problems, racial issues, gender issues—that rhetoric has been around for a long time can help us figure out how we got to where we are, especially when it’s not going so well.” And Hui Wu highlights the need for rhetoricians to continue “unfolding” what rhetoric means for those outside the field.

Given that we hope the OHI will be taken up as a resource for pursuing “narrative justice” within and beyond the context of rhetoric and RSA, we should note that this essay has not and could not tell *the* story of this archive, which is multifaceted and points in multiple historical, rhetorical, and aspirational directions. For example, Olson laments and draws attention to the arguably diminishing role pedagogy plays in rhetorical scholarship. In tandem with discussions of the inaugural RSA institute’s pedagogical focus and other interviewees’ comments (or lack thereof) about rhetoric as it pertains to pedagogy, one could trace the shifting ties between rhetorical scholarship and rhetorical education. Meanwhile, many interviewees mention the 2003 meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies (ARS). Despite the relatively short life of ARS, the interviews could constitute a significant resource for those interested in tracing the alliance’s influence and legacy. Empirically inclined rhetoricians might track interviewees’ references and cross-references to various scholars in order to map—digitally, quantitatively, visually—key influences and connections in the field.

And so we offer this archive and essay, humbly and intimately, as a way of opening future enterprises.

Afterword: For Charles Kneupper

These final words diverge from the structure of the rest of this essay but feel necessary. In the body of the interviews, we hear tributes to numerous rhetoricians who have passed on but had a significant influence on RSA: in addition to Berlin, Horner, Swearingen, and Yoos, interviewees such as Sue Wells and David Zarefsky praise the mentorship, kindness, and leadership of Michael Leff. But perhaps no one was as warmly or frequently remembered as Charles Kneupper, the main organizer of the early RSA conferences in Arlington. At the very start of his OHI interview, Michael Feehan notes that he has an “ulterior motive”: “I want to talk about Charles Kneupper.” As Feehan details, Kneupper was instrumental in making RSA what it has become. Before Kneupper, RSA “might get one session at SCA [i.e., the Speech Communication Association, now NCA]. We might get one session at CCCC. We might get nothing. But the real RSA was the few people who were in it, getting together in one of the other senior people’s hotel rooms, and over a few drinks, talking about what it would be like to have a real rhetoric culture in American academia.” Then, in the early 1980s, Kneupper “decided that he wanted to create conferences for the Rhetoric Society. So he called George Yoos. ... George Yoos was *the* core [of RSA]. He said he didn’t have any authority to do this. ‘If you want to have one, have one.’ ... So ... Charles just created it. We had the first one at [UT-Arlington] in 1984.” After the conference, “Charles gathered together most of the papers from that conference, and he went around trying to get someone to publish them. Months and months and months, he was knocking on doors, calling people, beating his head on the walls like a junkyard dog. ... He finally got the National Council of Teachers of English to agree to distribute it.” In short, says Feehan, “he created this thing that just keeps getting bigger. But it’s *Charles’s* creation.”

Cynthia Haynes notes that when Kneupper died of AIDS and AIDS-related complications in the late 1980s, AIDS and sexual orientation were still topics that went largely unmentioned. Regarding Kneupper, Haynes says,

We knew, but many people didn’t know at all about his private life or anything. And when he got sick, it happened fast. ... So he passed away, and I was very devastated. ... There were people who did not want to touch his things, if you can believe that, because he passed away of AIDS. ... I was a graduate student and director of the writing center at the same time. ... And our writing center was in a former department, so we had not just one room. We had a floor. ... So Charles’s books in his office—I said, “I want to make a Charles Kneupper Memorial Library.” So I did, and I cleaned his office out, I saved his papers, organized them. I moved the books. I took one of [the writing center’s] tutoring rooms. ... I set up the Charles Kneupper Memorial Library.

The OHI archive includes two photos taken by Haynes: one of decorations on Kneupper’s office door, and another of the Charles Kneupper Memorial Library at UT-Arlington.

Inspired by Feehan's and Haynes's words, as well as those of other OHI interviewees, we take this opportunity to memorialize Charles Kneupper once more, acknowledging that RSA would not be the organization it is without his legacy.

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Appendix: Interview Instructions

1. Greet your interviewee and find a convenient, relatively quiet spot for the interview.
2. Prepare and start audio recorder.
3. Once the device is recording, state your name, your interviewee's name, and the date and time.
4. Conduct the interview, using the provided template questions and your own follow-ups/improvised questions as appropriate.

Use the following questions as guidelines for the structure of these interviews. Please try to cover the topics these questions suggest, but feel free to use your own judgment when it comes to follow-up questions and improvised questions based on your interviewee's responses. Remember the following: (1) As an oral historian, your task is to get your interviewee talking, not to play a central role in what's happening. Please try to keep interjections and your own commentary to a minimum. Asking questions is your top priority. (2) Try to avoid leading questions and yes-or-no questions. However, if your interviewee does respond to a question with a simple "yes" or "no," that's fine. Just try to ask more open-ended questions to prompt them to elaborate. (3) Silence is okay. Don't feel you need to jump in right when your interviewee seems to be finished with an answer. Sometimes taking a beat can lead them to elaborate. (4) Keep the clock in mind. Please wrap things up in a timely fashion, both out of respect for your interviewee's time and so that recording equipment is available for subsequent interviewers.

1. When did you first join RSA?
2. How did you first learn about the organization?

3. How would you describe the organization when you first joined it?
4. Who are some of the key people you remember meeting or working with during your early years as part of RSA?
5. What was RSA doing when you first joined? What were its major projects and goals?
6. What are your most important or prominent memories related to RSA?
7. How has the organization changed throughout the time you've been part of it?
8. How do you think RSA will change in the years to come?
9. What are your hopes for the organization's future?