David Zarefsky, 1993 President, National Communication Association

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Beginnings

My path to the communication discipline, and eventually to the presidency of the National Communication Association (NCA; then called the Speech Communication Association), first took definite shape in the spring of 1961, when I was in the ninth grade in Houston. Two teachers invited me to represent our middle school at an upcoming citywide speech contest. I had had no formal instruction in speech, and I have no memory of how I performed in the competition or even what kind of contest it was. But I remember enjoying it very much and responding positively to the subsequent suggestion that I enroll in “Speech I” when I entered high school in the coming fall.

Although that was my first encounter with competitive speech, there were precursors, of course. The eldest of three brothers, I grew up in a home characterized by dinner-table conversation about current events, by commitments to education and especially to reading (we did not have a television set until I was 10), and by open discussion about family issues. My parents were political liberals in a conservative city on the edge of the South at the time of the civil rights movement, so there was much to discuss about values and moral issues. I always did well in school, except for physical education, for which I had neither aptitude nor interest. I remember occasionally giving oral reports in school, but my Bar Mitzvah speech was my first significant public-speaking occasion.

Not only was the Speech I course valuable in its own right, but it was the gateway to participation on the debate team. I was invited to join, and in the spring of 1962 began what was to be the most powerful formative experience of my life. I had the good fortune to have two outstanding coaches—Mollie Martin during my sophomore year and then, after she left the school, Bill Henderson. Bill and I had a somewhat rocky start (he had come from a rival high school and replaced a coach we had idolized), but our relationship soon became, and remains to this day, very close. My high school debate experience was made more pleasant as a result of competitive success. During my senior year, we won the Texas state debate championship (competing against a team including now U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett), and I won the championship in Original Oratory at the National Forensic League tournament that summer.

More than competitive success, however, high school forensics gave me a new vision of what would become my professional identity.

For some time, I had thought that I would be a teacher. I had had many good teachers and I wanted to share ideas with students, inspiring them to think critically and creatively, as those teachers had done for me. I was fairly certain that I wanted to teach high school, and I was sure that my field would be history, which had been my favorite subject for years. But Henderson explained that there was an academic discipline of speech, that I might want to consider it as an undergraduate major, and that Northwestern was good at it.

It is remarkable how unsystematic my college selection process was—a clear proof of the power of serendipity. I applied to only three schools, all of them sight unseen, and they were very different institutions. One was an Ivy League university where I was wait-listed, one was a large
public university of national renown, and the third was Northwestern. Had I made either of the other two choices, I never would have discovered the communication discipline, because they did not offer it. At Northwestern, I majored in what was then called speech education. I completed the requirements in public address and group communication (as communication studies was then known) plus the specialized courses required for teaching certification. I also completed minors in both history and English, and had an exposure to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. I was able to pursue such a broad curriculum because I had six courses' worth of Advanced Placement credit and did not use it as a means to accelerate graduation.

At Northwestern, I had many excellent professors, including Franklyn Haiman, Jack Condon, and John Jellicorse in communication; Robert Wiebe, Clarence Ver Steeg, and Christopher Lasch in history; David Minar in political science; Richard Ellmann in English; Robert Eisner in economics; and Paul Schilpp in philosophy. But by far the undergraduate professor who had the greatest influence on me was the distinguished diplomatic historian Richard W. Leopold. Leopold taught a year-long course in the history of American foreign policy. It met three times per week at 8:00 a.m. and was conducted entirely by discussion. In addition to being an outstanding role model as a teacher, Leopold helped me to begin to see connections between history and speech, since much of foreign policy was conducted through public discourse. Had I been fortunate enough to study with Ernest Wrage, I am sure that I would have seen those connections even more clearly, but I just missed the opportunity. During my freshman year at Northwestern, Wrage was on leave at Berkeley where he died at the untimely age of 54.

Valuable as all my classes were, my most significant undergraduate activity was participation in intercollegiate debate. Never having attended a summer debate institute, I came to Northwestern as a “walk-on,” and I arrived at the same time as a new director of debate. Thomas McClain had been recruited from the University of Iowa where he was close to finishing a doctorate. McClain’s coaching style was “laid back,” but he was a wonderful mentor and friend, and was superb at nurturing good will for the Northwestern program. I also learned much in his classes in argumentation and in British public address.

For my first two years, in the shadow of our championship team, I competed mostly at the regional level with occasional undistinguished performance on the national circuit. During my junior and senior years, I was fortunate to debate on the top team, first with Michael Denger and then with Garry Mathiason, both of whom are extremely successful lawyers. With both Denger and Mathiason, I enjoyed a large measure of competitive success, winning several major invitational tournaments, reaching the quarterfinals at the National Debate Tournament both years, and being chosen Top Speaker at the NDT my senior year.

More important than the tournament records, though, were the people we met—an “invisible college” of debaters and coaches all across the nation. There was, in those years, an important social component to debate tournaments, and at this McClain excelled. Following his example, we made friends with many of our opponents and their coaches, and several of these friendships survive to this day. Then as now, most debaters go on to law school, but unlike both of my brothers, that path never appealed to me. I was beginning to think about graduate school, however, and also to think about whether I would do better in college teaching than in high school. McClain encouraged this reconsideration and urged me to apply to graduate school. I did so, including an application to Northwestern (he was encouraging me especially to consider Iowa). But I was less than enthusiastic. It was the winter of 1968; the news media were reporting (incorrectly) that President Johnson was about to send 200,000 additional troops to
Vietnam, and there were no graduate deferments. The only thing I think I have in common with Vice President Cheney is that I had other priorities at the time. So my plan was to defer graduate school until after the war and to seek a high school teaching and debate coaching position in the meanwhile. I would take advantage of my newly minted teaching credentials, and I was considering teaching opportunities in Houston.

The Arc of a Professional Career

Then another serendipitous event occurred. Glen Mills, who had been on the Northwestern faculty for 25 years and Associate Dean of the School of Speech since 1956, abruptly announced that he would be leaving to take a position at the University of California at Santa Barbara. To fill his decanal position, Dean James McBurney appointed Roy Wood, who recently had joined the faculty in public address and group communication. Wood’s move to the Dean’s office created a faculty vacancy in the department, and it was now late in the spring. I was asked to become a one-year interim instructor—a faculty position that would enable me to have an occupational deferment from the draft* and I was told that, if I scheduled things carefully, I could complete a master’s degree “on the side.”

Looking back, I am not sure how I managed the workload. I had a teaching load of nine courses (with debate coaching counting for three of them) while also taking nine graduate courses and working on my master’s thesis. Somehow I survived and received my master’s degree in June of 1969. The best thing that has happened to me at Northwestern occurred that year. One of the strongest students in my first public speaking class was a woman named Nikki Martin. We began dating the following summer and were married 18 months after that; we plan to celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2010. Originally she also had planned to do graduate work in communication, but she changed course and has enjoyed careers first as a school social worker and then as a high school reading teacher. The strength of our marriage and the lives of our two children are my greatest sources of pride.

Toward the end of my one-year appointment, another faculty member left very late in the year. I was given the opportunity to extend my appointment for another year and at least to begin doctoral course work. The following year, Tom McClain resigned, and I was appointed as Director of Forensics, so I was now occupying a regular faculty line. My teaching load had dropped to only six courses per year, but of course my debate coaching responsibilities had increased. I finished course work in 1971 and received my Ph.D. in 1974. Leland Griffin directed my dissertation. His guidance and counsel were most helpful, except that he did not intervene to protect me from myself: my dissertation topic was too broad and the work was too long (I have tried to be more directive with my own advisees.) I was promoted to assistant professor in 1974 and, hard as it is to believe given current standards, I received tenure the same year. I must say that I regarded the grant of tenure as a vote of confidence that I would need to justify, not as a recognition of past achievement.

Almost immediately upon joining the Northwestern faculty in 1968, I also joined three professional associations: the Speech Association of America (as NCA was then called), the American Forensic Association, and the Central States Speech Association. I did so partly in order to receive tangible benefits—mainly, journal subscriptions—and partly because I understood that it was “the thing to do” to show one’s identity with the profession.

I began a program of teaching and research in argumentation and public address. As my work matured, I came to think of these as overlapping rather than separate subfields.* I taught a wide
variety of undergraduate and (eventually) graduate classes, ranging from survey courses to highly specialized topical seminars (a luxury permitted by the quarter system). I always saw teaching and research as mutually supportive. Most of my publications have concerned argumentation theory or the critical study of American public discourse with special emphasis on the 1850s or the 1960s. I was privileged to be named by the Northwestern student government to the Faculty Honor Roll, to be named twice by SCA as the recipient of the Winans-Wichelns Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address, and to receive the Distinguished Scholar Award from both NCA and AFA.

I had not planned on a career in University administration, although I had developed managerial skills as a result of directing the debate program. When Frank Haiman decided to step down as department chair and an external search proved to be unsuccessful, I was asked to become chair. Although I could count votes as well as the next person, I was still somewhat surprised, if only because I was the most junior member of the faculty and was not quite 29 years of age. It was an intimidating responsibility, and I thought about it for some time before saying yes. It turned out to be an outstanding professional and personal growth experience. I could not have had a better dean to work with than Roy Wood. Our thoughts were usually on the same wavelength. Roy understood and supported my strategic objectives. I also had supportive colleagues so that my time as chair was remarkably free of acrimony. During those years, the department grew, not only in size (from 8 to 16) but, more importantly, in stature. We leveraged the growth in undergraduate enrollment to make hires that would also strengthen the graduate program, and I was thrilled to see our graduate program rise in the SCA reputational rankings while our undergraduate program remained very strong.

I served as chair for eight years, at which time Roy asked me to become associate dean for academic affairs. This post enabled me to learn a good deal about the School and the relationships among its component parts. When I had been in that office for just over four years, Roy decided to leave Northwestern to return to his alma mater, the University of Denver. Following a search process, University President Arnold Weber invited me to become the School’s fifth dean. I served in that role from February 1988 through June 2000. Those years were marked by growth in the faculty and student body, improved quality, strengthened infrastructure, and greater external reach. I continued to teach an undergraduate and graduate course every year that I was in the Dean’s office (with the exception of the year I planned the SCA convention). Taking advantage of a research assistantship earmarked for the Dean, I also continued a research program and published at a moderate pace. These decisions made for a relatively seamless transition when I left the Dean’s office and returned to the full-time faculty in 2000.

My years in administration at Northwestern taught me several lessons that would be of great value as I moved into the leadership of professional organizations. One was that an organization does not exist in order to be administered; rather, administration is a means to pursue the organization’s mission. Another is that the greatest powers of most offices are agenda-setting authority and the opportunity to use the bully pulpit. And a third was the importance of gaining members’ confidence and coordinating their efforts and activities while liberally sharing the credit for achievement and success.

Involvement in Professional Organizations

Being involved primarily with forensics in my early career, I became active in AFA first. During the 1970s, I chaired its Publications Committee, was a member of the National Debate
Tournament Committee, and served on the Editorial Board and subsequently as the editor of its journal. I was nominated twice for the presidency of AFA, in 1978 and 1980, and lost both times to my good friend Gerald Sanders. The margin the second time was reportedly so small that I facetiously suggested that Jerry—a fellow Texan—had emulated the vote-counting techniques attributed to Lyndon Johnson in the 1948 U.S. Senate campaign, which he had won by 87 votes.

During the mid-1980s, I was elected to the presidency of the Central States Speech Association. I had served on some of CSSA’s committees but had been less active than in AFA. As president-elect, I planned the 1986 convention with the theme, “Competent Communicators.” My presidential goals included helping to define a niche for regional organizations, strengthening mentoring for beginning scholars, combating a perceived dichotomy between teaching and research, and retaining the involvement of distinguished senior scholars. These objectives quickly proved moot once we discovered, shortly after I took office, that the association was in serious financial difficulty for reasons that we could not at first identify. The entirety of my presidential term (and of the next two years) was consumed in trying to identify the source of the problem—which turned out to be embezzlement—and to solve it, while also devising a short-term funding source that would enable CSSA to continue functioning in the meanwhile. This required obtaining a loan, and with trepidation, we approached the SCA Administrative Committee and Finance Board. They were not only appropriately skeptical, they were excessively so. Some thought CSSA could just go under without repercussions for the discipline as a whole. Others may have thought mistakenly that the CSSA officers were the source of the problem rather than working for its solution. Ultimately SCA agreed to lend up to $22,000—provided that individual members of CSSA would personally guarantee the loan. Having worked to persuade SCA, I now had to persuade colleagues to put their own money on the line. Ultimately 24 members each agreed to guarantee $1,000. In the end, CSSA needed to borrow only $15,000 and repaid the loan more than a year in advance. This whole experience taught me three important lessons: unforeseen circumstances can hijack a leader’s agenda; effective leadership of an organization requires knowledge and control of its finances; and leaders must manage often complex circumstances while being able to describe them to relevant audiences clearly and understandably.

Meanwhile, my involvement in SCA began to grow. I had one exposure to the Association’s governance when I chaired the Forensics Division in 1976. I coordinated the Division’s program planning for the 1975 convention (in those days, each Division was allotted five program slots!) and served on the Legislative Council in 1976 and 1977. The major issue in those years was the proposal to relocate future conventions away from states that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. But SCA also approved a proposal Malcolm Sillars and I had developed, with the support of the Forensics Division, for the co-sponsorship of a summer conference on argumentation. Originally planned as a one-time venture, the conference proved so successful that it has been held biennially since 1979.

I had another tour of duty on the Legislative Council when I was elected to an at large position for a term beginning in 1986. Since I was president of CSSA at the same time, this fortuitous circumstance made me a more effective advocate for the regional association. It did seem, though, that there was a sense of ennui pervading these LC meetings, especially after the long-term Executive Secretary, William Work, announced his intention to retire in the summer of 1988. During these same years, I had been proposed for a seat on the Finance Board. I was quite interested in such an appointment as I thought it would enable me to learn about and
possibly influence the organization. After having been nominated unsuccessfully a few times (I was “not old enough,” I was told), I was chosen for a Finance Board seat beginning in 1988. Starting this responsibility at the same time I was beginning my deanship at Northwestern was not the most convenient schedule, but I managed. And compared to the structure of the University budget about which I was learning at the same time, the SCA budget was fairly easy to comprehend (and there were not as many digits).

The Administrative Committee, which met the next day, interviewed finalists for the Executive Secretary position (subsequently renamed Executive Director). As the junior member of the Finance Board, I had no vote, but I strongly agreed with the majority that James Gaudino was by far the best candidate. I was delighted when he was chosen and he accepted, and I began a close working relationship and a continuing good friendship. SCA (and subsequently NCA) was greatly blessed by Gaudino’s 15 years as its CEO. He left a far stronger, more financially secure, more programatically active, and more visionary organization than he had inherited. The early years were marked especially by efforts to develop or update procedure manuals, to introduce computers and information technology, to develop more responsive member services, to budget more intelligently, and to expand the National Office through the purchase of a third office condominium adjacent to the original two in Annandale, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, DC.

In my first year on the Finance Board, I was approached about running for Second Vice President. Initially I demurred, because I did not think that I could be a credible candidate as long as the finances of CSSA had not been completely resolved and my name was linked to that issue. Repayment of the loan in April 1989 removed that obstacle, and when I was approached that fall by the Nominating Committee, I agreed to be a candidate.

While the election was underway, I was Chair of the Finance Board. As our financial records became more sophisticated, we discovered that we were facing the prospect of a serious structural deficit. We decided to propose a significant dues increase—an unattractive prospect under any circumstances—but it would have to be approved by the Legislative Council and could not take effect until the following year. We were contemplating major cuts in services when we realized that there was a potential income source that could be tapped immediately. At $48 per year, library subscriptions to our journals were priced well below their market value. With fingers crossed, we doubled those rates (which still left them below market value), effective immediately. In fact, library subscriptions did not decline and this change brought a greater measure of short-term financial stability to SCA. The proposed dues increase and restructuring then sailed through the Legislative Council, with most discussion focused on the important but quite tangential question of whether, for purposes of dues collection, Communication Teacher would be considered a journal. (By one vote, the decision was yes.)

Colleagues asked why I would consider seeking the SCA presidency. I gave the same answer I’ve given whenever I’ve been asked about my involvement in professional service. First, the infrastructure of an academic discipline is not self-executing. Those who have benefitted, as I have, from the availability of conferences, journals, disciplinary advocacy, public liaison, and the other work of our professional organizations have a responsibility to contribute to those organizations for the sake of the discipline’s future. And second, professional service is an opportunity to have an impact on an organization about which one cares strongly, and in that respect to make a difference to the profession.

The SCA Presidency
My opponent in the SCA election was Judy Pearson. This was a source of some amusement for us since I had run for CSSA president against her husband, Paul Nelson. I had great respect for Judy’s work but did not know her well at the start of the campaign. Appearing together at the regional conventions—which I enjoyed—and sometimes even traveling together, Judy and I became and remain good friends. We each wanted the office, to be sure, but the competitive aspect of the campaign was inflected with a strong dose of civility and mutual respect. After the election, I supported her for an open seat on the Educational Policies Board, so that SCA could continue to benefit from her service without hiatus, and I was pleased several years later when she ran again for Second Vice President and was elected, succeeding to the presidency of NCA in 2003.

I understudied with Dennis Gouran and Dale Leathers, my two immediate predecessors, and learned much from observing them in action. (Gouran and I previously had had the same relationship in CSSA.) I was responsible for planning the 1992 convention, which set attendance records long since surpassed. We were moving away from the days of scheduling the convention on butcher-block paper, but it was still done manually. I used a word-processing program to alphabetize the participants, but scheduling technology was in its infancy and a program such as All Academic was not even imagined. While the National Office provided valuable staff support, the actual creation of the schedule was the responsibility of the First Vice President. The major change in the convention was the elimination of 7:00 a.m. programs, which had been added in recent years to accommodate the growing size. This was the first step toward the current practice of avoiding crack-of-dawn and late-night sessions, though at the price of increasing the number of simultaneous sessions during the day. I noted that the convention occurred on the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s voyage, and predicted that, after centuries of discovery, exploration, development, growth, and modernization, the coming century would be dominated by communication. I selected “The Communication Century” as the convention theme. Except for the transparent manipulation in the titles of some sessions, I saw no evidence that the theme had influenced the contents of the convention—which I think is the usual fate of convention themes.

I became president in the aftermath of a name-change referendum—the second within five years, as I recall—that had failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds vote to change to the American Communication Association. I had supported the change but did not feel that the name made much difference in how SCA was perceived or in its ability to carry out its mission. And I was convinced that the energy devoted on both sides of the name-change issue came at the expense of other SCA priorities. Once the results of the referendum were in, therefore, I tried to put the issue to rest and to focus attention on other matters.

I also thought that SCA was vexed then by a problem that continues to affect us: the tension between the parts and the whole. Simply put, the substructure of the association has proliferated at a far faster rate than the membership has grown. We have increasingly specialized constituencies that do not regularly engage one another’s work. Under the circumstances, the association becomes little more than a holding company for these various interest groups. Worse, virtually every constituency believed that it was underserved by the parent organization. The results were that SCA’s governance and staff were largely devoted to internal allocation issues, not to larger strategic objectives that would advance the discipline as a whole, and also that members’ identification with SCA was weak.

This perception dictated my principal priority as president: to strengthen the whole vis-a’-vis the parts. Several activities were undertaken in support of that goal. (1) The Legislative Council was
strengthened through an orientation session for new members, the adoption of standing rules, and the development of a process for considering resolutions on matters of policy. (2) The Administrative Committee developed the association’s first strategic plan—an early attempt to identify association-wide priorities. (3) The National Office was restructured and strengthened. During the 1960s, it had gained two professional positions in addition to the Executive Secretary and Associate Executive Secretary: a Director of Research and a Director of Education Services. The Director of Research position had been eliminated in a subsequent budget cut, with the result that the Research Board and several vocal constituencies did not feel represented in the National Office. But we found the distinction between research and education to be artificial, and many projects dealt with both. As a result, we added one position to the National Office and redefined the position of Director of Education Services, with the result that there would be two Associate Directors without portfolio, and we recommended that in staffing them the Executive Director should obtain both research and education expertise. (4) The National Office also was strengthened by clarifying the role of the Executive Director. He or she would have authority to hire, manage, and evaluate the staff; the Administrative Committee would not micro-manage the office but would relate to and evaluate the Executive Director. (5) Summer conferences on particular themes were reinstituted; 1993 saw a quite successful conference on cultural studies. (6) With the support of Jim Gaudino, I initiated a regular “President’s Column” in Spectra. I used this column largely as a bully pulpit to alert members to association-wide issues or to emphasize how different constituencies within SCA benefited from one another’s success. (7) Nearly 20 years after the move of the National Office to Washington, DC, we began what I think was the first effort to make the association known to the appropriate government offices and funding agencies. On two separate occasions, Gaudino and I spent several days on introductory “walking around” visits especially to the National Institutes of Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Department of Education. In general, we found program officers to be uninformed but receptive. We also affiliated with the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA). These limited and tentative efforts at least raised our consciousness about the importance of government relations. (8) I determined to use my Presidential Address to speak to a relevant issue external to the association—in my case, the weakening of the public forum in a postmodern age. I knew that many presidents had addressed internal association matters, especially the need for a more diverse membership. Without objecting to those messages, I thought that they limited the effectiveness of the presidential bully pulpit. I was particularly pleased, therefore, when through Gaudino’s efforts my address was published not only in Spectra but also in Vital Speeches of the Day and (with slight modifications) in the Kettering Review.11

To be honest, these activities and achievements did not unfold with the thematic consistency I have suggested here; nor did everything that came up fit neatly within my priorities. And some of my ideas led to failure. For example, I had proposed removing from the convention program the identity of sponsoring units for each session, on the theory that the program belonged not to any unit but to the entire association, whereas identifying unit sponsors subtly signaled who was and was not the intended audience for each session. My successor, Bruce Gronbeck, actually implemented this idea, and the backlash was so intense that it was never tried again. (Sorry about that, Bruce.) I’m also not sure, when the record is added up, just how much was accomplished toward strengthening the whole vis-a-vis the parts. Looking back, though, I am pleased with this record and believe that it did make some positive difference to SCA. Though my time as an officer entailed large amounts of sometimes difficult work, I found it immensely rewarding on both professional and personal levels, not least in that it widened considerably my circle of colleagues and friends.
The Post-Presidency

As I was nearing the end of nine consecutive years on the Legislative Council, I was approached by a member who assumed that my career was now finished and that I was ready to retire—this while I was at the age of 48! Much as I enjoyed it, I must say that I did not view the SCA presidency as the pinnacle of my career. I like to think that that description belongs to whatever I am doing at the moment. In the years since 1994, I have continued to teach, to conduct research, and to participate actively in SCA (which became NCA in 1997) and in other professional organizations. Gaudino and subsequent presidents involved me in specific projects, and I was privileged to serve from 1998 through 2005 as NCA’s first delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies.

When I left the Dean’s office at Northwestern, I had not completely satisfied my interest in administrative leadership. So in response to invitations, I “reinvested” in professional organizations. I was appointed Director of NCA’s Publications Board from 2004 through 2006, and in that capacity I had a third tour of duty on the Legislative Council (now called Legislative Assembly). On the Publications Board, I oversaw revision of the Publications Manual, the launching of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, and the renegotiation of NCA’s contract with Routledge/Taylor and Francis—as well as the appointment of editors for each of NCA’s journals and annuals.

I also rejoined the leadership of the Central States Communication Association (which had since changed its name from “Speech” to “Communication”) when I was appointed to chair its Finance Committee in 2005. My principal activities were to design a template for budget planning and monitoring and to develop a policy for the management and utilization of reserves and other restricted funds. I worked closely with Executive Directors Scott Myers and Shelly Schaefer Hinck, and with the elected officers. The experience confirmed what I had learned at SCA: understanding the budget is probably the best way to understand the organization.

Belatedly, in 2000, I joined the Rhetoric Society of America. Two years later, I was named to its Board of Directors, and I served as its president in 2006-7. RSA is different from the other organizations in which I’d been involved because it is interdisciplinary. About 40% of its membership comes from communication, about 40% from English, and the remainder from philosophy, classics, law, anthropology, sociology, and other fields. Its biennial conference is much smaller than NCA, but the mixing of disciplinary cultures and the lack of a national office nevertheless make it a challenge to plan. I was responsible for the 2006 conference, which I thought was quite successful. I also led the initiatives to obtain membership for RSA in the American Council of Learned Societies, to obtain 501(c)3 status with the Internal Revenue Service, and to investigate the feasibility of sponsoring a series of university press books. My involvement in RSA has been especially rewarding because I have found many new colleagues across disciplinary lines and because RSA has been experiencing rapid growth. In no sense do I regard it in conflict with NCA. Rhetorical scholars should be at home in both organizations; they serve different purposes and I am particularly pleased that each is an affiliate of the other.

Conclusion

My terms in this latest round of professional organization roles wound down between 2006 and 2009. While I remain active and interested, I believe that I have fully satisfied my aspirations for leadership. During the same years, I reassessed my own career trajectory. Feeling the personal need for a change, not really desiring to move elsewhere, and wanting more control of my time,
I applied for promotion to Professor Emeritus effective September 1, 2009. I feel very fortunate that I was financially able to take this step. I do not plan to disappear or to end my professional career but rather to function more as an independent scholar, working largely on my own schedule and priorities but continuing to read, to write, and occasionally to teach. As I write this, I am two months into this newest phase of my life, and I think I really am going to enjoy it. I am still working on old business (including this long overdue essay) so the transition will be gradual, but I feel that I am going in the right direction.

Choosing self-descriptors is tricky. As I reflect on the arc of my professional career, I would like to be known as well organized, reasonable, analytical, efficient, fair, conscientious, even-tempered, and friendly.

Over the years, I have worked hard, but I have been very lucky in the opportunities that have come to me and in the personal fulfillment that has come from academic and organizational leadership, especially in NCA. I have been blessed with talented students, congenial colleagues, challenging experiences, and very good friends. It has been an extremely rewarding and pleasant professional career—at least so far.

Notes

[1] At the time of my presidency, the organization was named the Speech Communication Association. Founded in 1914 as the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, it changed its name in 1923 to the National Association of Teachers of Speech, in 1946 to the Speech Association of America, in 1970 to the Speech Communication Association, and in 1997 to the National Communication Association. Except in the title, I use the name of the association that was current at the time of the events I am describing.

[2] In Houston, where I grew up, middle school (junior high) comprised grades 7-9, and senior high, grades 10-12.

[3] I later would direct the Forensics Division of the National High School Institute, at Northwestern, during the years from 1968 through 1980 and found it one of the most rewarding teaching experiences I have ever had.

[4] Another of my classmates was Richard Briggs, who years later would become the president of the Owen L. Coon Foundation, which played an important role in supporting my work from 1965 (when I was appointed as a Hardy Scholar) through 2009 (when I retired as the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate).

[5] What no one seemed to notice was that Instructor was a tenure-track rank at Northwestern. My tenure “clock,” therefore, began very early.

[6] For a review of this research program, see Angela G. Ray, “The Transcript of a Continuing Conversation: David Zarefsky and Public Address,” Argumentation and Advocacy, 45 (Fall, 2008), 64-79.


[9] Officially known as the NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation, it is popularly known as the Alta Conference, after the Utah location where it has been held.

[10] In those days, SCA published its own journals, recovering all revenues and incurring all costs. For a variety of reasons, the association initiated a partnership with a commercial publisher, Routledge/Taylor and Francis, in 2002.


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