



A Time of Firsts

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My academic career has been one of many firsts. I was the first in my family to graduate from college and the first to earn graduate degrees. I was the first faculty member of Mexican heritage to be department chair and later vice provost at my university. So, it wasn't much of a surprise that I would be the first First Vice President of CSCA to plan a convention in 2020 that didn't happen and that I would be the first President to preside at a virtual convention in 2021. Finally, because the Executive Committee made the decision to freeze the officer rotation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I will be the first to serve 2 consecutive years as CSCA President. My career is one of asterisks.

It has been a pleasure to work with the Executive Committee (EC) over this past year. Members of the EC are always on-call between conventions to respond to issues that require consultation or an immediate vote. The journal editors have continued their work. It has been a time of immense challenge, uncertainty, and even trauma. Creating avenues for growth and, yes, *inspiration* is special in hard times. First Vice President Dr. Deb Ford and Executive Director Dr. Tiffany Wang deserve special credit. Deb planned two conventions, the first was the anticipated face-to-face convention in Cincinnati and the second was the eventual virtual convention. After considerable research, Tiffany found a vendor who provided a trouble-free and user-friendly platform for our 2021 Annual Convention, *Inspire!* We had a record-breaking registration for the Preconvention on "Decolonizing the Discipline" that was planned by Dr. Ahmet Atay. We celebrated 2 years of Hall of Fame inductees. Videos and summaries of award recipients can be found at the CSCA Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/CentralStatesComm/?ref=page_internal. Having canceled the 2020 convention, it was vital to provide members with a 2021 convention experience that was safe and accessible.

Crisis communication scholars define a *mega-crisis* as "a complex set of interacting crises that is severe in impact, complex in nature and global in fallout, with no distinct start and end points" (Yen & Salmon, 2017, p. 7). The COVID-19 pandemic that we endured was a mega-crisis that brought with it a number

of ongoing and interrelated crises. Most immediate was the very real threat of infection. For the first time, we were mandated to stay home. The lockdown we experienced from mid-March 2020 and into 2021 disrupted our professional, social, and personal routines. The lockdown exposed the crisis of underemployment and low wages. What many hailed as record employment before the pandemic was an economy largely sustained by “essential workers” who worked long hours for low pay and no benefits. The mega-crisis also exposed a health-care system that provided uneven quality of care and affordability determined by race, ethnicity, and income. As a result, the pandemic disproportionately impacted communities of color. Additionally, the same disparities in health care were found in the continuing crisis in law enforcement and the justice system in the U.S. In May 2020, the world was horrified by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Tens of thousands of people in the U.S. and around the world, many for the first time, joined marches and protest actions to demand justice for those who died by police violence. Finally, the pandemic exposed the crisis of weak international alliances. Growing distrust among nations resulted in competitive grabs for medical equipment and a lack of information sharing. These crises intensified while those of us in higher education struggled to re-boot our classes for online delivery and prepared to show greater empathy toward our students and colleagues. It is my hope that our scholarship can be directed toward unpacking these crises utilizing our respective methods and perspectives.

So, 2020 was a time when we lived in fear for ourselves and for our loved ones. We tried to stay in contact as much as possible as Webex and Zoom became part of our vocabularies and daily lives. We vented, commiserated, did a lot of cleaning, and even found time to plan. After all, a friend once told me that, “A good organization gets better even in the bad times.” We have tried to make CSCA better even in these bad times.

In 2020, CSCA was emerging from its own narrow escape from dissolution. For details, see the 2020 Presidential Spotlight (McBride & Edwards, 2020). I was hoping that the Chicago convention, “Borders and Breakthroughs,” would be our breakthrough moment. It was not to be. Our leadership team resolved to move forward on a number of initiatives and ideas as we looked toward the 2021 convention. We wanted to get better even in bad times. Since last year, we have done the following:

- ▶ Updated our Constitution and Bylaws. Our Mission Statement now includes two additional goals—to advance “discourse that supports traditionally marginalized people within and beyond the conference” and to advance “policies that support traditionally marginalized people and aim to achieve inclusivity and equity.”
 - ▶ Created an Ad Hoc Equity and Diversity Committee and appointed as chair, Dr. Matthew Heinz, former Dean of the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences and founding Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Royal Roads University. Our goal is to have this become a Standing Committee.
 - ▶ Appointed Dr. Yuping Mao, California State University, Long Beach, to be Editor-In-Chief of *Communication Studies*. To read the announcement of her appointment, please see the CSCA Bulletin dated March 29, 2021.
 - ▶ Charged the Finance Committee to investigate socially responsible investing as a framework for managing CSCA investments.
 - ▶ Created an early-evening session at the 2022 Madison convention for the Carolyn Calloway-Thomas Speaker Series. This scheduling change prevents conflicts with any other sessions.
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- ▶ Approved a *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* Article of the Year Award to create parity with the *Communication Studies* Article of the Year Award.
- ▶ Allocated funding for a Faculty & Student Learning Community to facilitate professional development for BIPOC members. A development fund has been started for this initiative. If you are interested in donating to this fund, please contact Executive Director Tiffany Wang.

Our efforts to make CSCA better for its members relies on all of us. I realize that members are at different points in their careers and that a professional association isn't always a priority. But it can be at times. I urge all members to feel free to contact anyone on the EC or me whenever you have an idea or observation that you wish to share. Make it a first!

As we anticipate the Madison, Wisconsin, convention, and with the impulse to critically understand our environment, I urge all of us to be mindful of the indigenous history of the Madison area. Through Dr. Amanda Brown, I have been in contact with a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, Ho-Chunk meaning "People of the Big Voice" or "People of the Sacred Language" (Loew, 2013, p. 44). The Wisconsin Historical Museum has a very good relationship with the indigenous peoples of Wisconsin. Deb, Tiffany, and I toured the museum on our site visit to Madison in June. The exhibits are excellent. In addition to the book by Loew, another book recommended by my contact is *Mountain Wolf Woman: A Ho-Chunk Girlhood* (Holliday, 2007). I have read this book and it is appropriate for readers of all ages! I hope that through the convention we can have a greater understanding of and respect for the indigenous past and present of the Madison area.

We all have our own "firsts." Maybe you are the first person in your family to leave your home country to attend school or teach in the U.S. Maybe you are the first to earn a degree while raising a family. Maybe you are the first to teach classes and be a caregiver for someone. Now, we are beginning to resume our pre-COVID routines and enter a new realm of firsts. We are having our first maskless visits with family and friends, post-pandemic. We are preparing to teach our first live and in-person classes, post-pandemic. As an association, let's celebrate our firsts when we *Re-Connect* in March 2022.

References

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