

President's Report 2020-2021

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It's my pleasure to present the president's report for the RhetCanada 2021 AGM. My main goals for this year were to coordinate our first online conference, to keep association members connected, and to provide for continuity in the executive and committees to ensure the work of the association can continue. The first was accomplished, the second was partially accomplished, and the third will be complete after the 2021 AGM.

Our [first online conference](#), held in association with the virtual Congress 2021, was a success, with many outstanding presentations by both faculty and students and vigorous, thoughtful discussions during the Burkean Parlors. Because this was not only RhetCanada's first online conference but also the first online Congress, planning and logistics were at times challenging, but in the end the conference went smoothly from both an organizational and technical perspective. I'd like to thank the RhetCanada executive for their support during the planning of the conference, the members of the Conference Planning Committee for their advice and feedback during the planning process, and the Advisory committee for its help in vetting the new conference proposals. And, of course, I'd also like to thank the presenters and chairs for all their work and for their success in maintaining the unique collegial spirit of past RhetCanada conferences even though the event took place in an entirely new medium.

The conference raised some questions the organization needs to consider. The first is whether we maintain an online component to the conference, integrating both live and online presentations, or move back to an entirely live format. Certainly the 2021 conference showed that online presentation formats are viable, and yet the face-to-face interaction of members during and between presentations has been an important part of the association's meetings for the last forty years.

At this time the location and theme of Congress 2022 has not been announced, although more news is expected to be available later in June. Given current trends around the pandemic, I would anticipate that next year's Congress will be in-person.

Another question raised during the planning of the conference, by public events over the past year, and in conversations at our conference is how RhetCanada might diversify its membership and work to connect more with current developments around racial and anti-colonial issues. Mis-steps by the Federation in its handling of the postponement of its 2019 theme (Bridging Divides: Confronting Colonialism and Anti-Black Racism) led the Black Canadian Studies Association to withdraw from Congress this year. Some other associations withdrew as well, while others, [including RhetCanada](#), published statements in solidarity with the BCSA, calling on the Federation to revisit the 2019 theme as soon as possible. I also contacted the Federation personally to express my concerns. The question of how we can make our membership and programming more inclusive is a topic I believe the association would benefit from considering.

Regarding connection of association members, the idea, posed at the last AGM, of a RhetCanada newsletter didn't transpire this year, but it is still on the agenda for the coming year. One product that did bring members together was the *Rhetor* 8.1 special issue on national identity and rhetorical study, which featured essays, many of them quite personal as well as academic, from a number of association members. Congratulations to issue editor David Beard and to Chief Editor Tracy Whalen for bringing out the issue.

The active participation of members is central to the health of any academic association, so thanks again to the many people who contributed their time and expertise to RhetCanada over this past year. There are a number of position openings this year, with some members expressing an interest in continuing on in their current positions and others considering stepping back or moving on to other positions. We welcome anyone who is interested in stepping forward to support the work of the association, and we welcome ideas for any new initiatives that would help the association in its goal of promoting and supporting the study of rhetoric.

The success of our 2021 conference showed that, in spite of the cancellation of our 2020 conference, RhetCanada is still a vital and active association. I look forward to working with you all in the coming year to continue building the association and to seeing you at our 2022 conference.

