

## RhetCanada President's Report 2024

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From our conference in Toronto (May 2023) to our recent meetings in June 2024 (online, and a few days later, in Montreal), RhetCanada went through a period of growth that strikes me as equally chaotic and bountiful, with many promising experiments and initiatives that could become traditions. I should immediately thank Bruce Dadey, our past president (still active in multiple capacities!), and our engaged members for caring for our association during the precarious 2020-2023 stretch. I should also thank the many newcomers in 2024, bringing their considerable energy to the conference, and the dozens of people I've corresponded with who have eased or encouraged me in my role as new president, especially the executive committee. This report, written months after the June conference, will both review the past year and look ahead to the next one.

Both our jam-packed online and in-person conferences ran smoothly—despite labour action at McGill that caused numerous cancelations and disruptions across associations at Congress 2024—and we now enjoy the privilege of a larger, energized membership. With all of the new faces attending and initiatives brewing, our task will be to manage the problems and opportunities of the “too much of a good thing” variety. At the previous AGM, I proposed a new “dual conference” system, where a fully-online conference is joined to a fully in-person conference, and implemented exactly this. This worked well to prevent the technological and oratorical breakdowns caused by hybrid presentations.

Yet quite accidentally, that decision, combined with excellent conference promotions from Shannon Lodoen and others, caused the number of presenters to **more than double** from last year! This doubling was fantastic in many ways, and although I greatly enjoyed this growth as an audience member, I was sometimes overwhelmed as a first-time conference planner. It is my hope that a combination of better technologies, governance/delegation systems, and volunteering efforts will ease the conference planner role in the future. If we continue to see more presenters, we'll have to be thinking ahead carefully to maintain our treasured and distinctive plenary format, and our valuable yet labour-intensive student feedback process—we aren't ISHR or RSA, and should continue playing to our strengths while staying attuned to useful ideas we can borrow from other organizations.

In any scenario, we'll want to welcome and build solidarity among the future leaders of the association, and also warmly invite back veteran members and established scholars to share and model excellent research for the many newcomers. Achieving healthy demographic balances (from identities and geographies to interests and languages) in our conferences and our committees remains challenging because we cannot accurately predict a list of attendees; an RSVP/expression of interest system might be of use here. I encourage everyone to bring a friend or colleague, and I've been excited to see the growth of new interpersonal connections, which will hopefully become just as robust as our keen and welcoming plenary audience.

Various pieces of good news have been emerging behind the scenes, some of which are too recent to commit to posterity; you'll hear more in the coming year. When I became president, a member survey strongly recommended both non-summer events (which will definitely happen), and collaborative research platforms (which will happen if we can agree on a suitable technology). Beyond these two projects, additional initiatives are being led by others, which I greatly appreciate. As always, I encourage members to share ideas or requests for new projects; this year, additional projects will likely not happen unless the proponent also brings most of the energy and skills for their proposal. As always, the president's main job is making the conference happen, but I promise to keep listening and store the worthy ideas that we inevitably generate.

I'd like to thank and re-thank: Bruce, Shannon, David Beard, Kyle Gerber, and Monique Kampher for their many and various efforts on the executive committee; Tess Laidlaw, Ryan McGuckin, and David for their student paper feedback; Julie Dainville, John Moffat, and Bruce for editing Rhetor, and John Hogenbirk for his talented branding work. I also appreciate the efforts of our expanding array of reviewers, and more generally, the dozens of past and current members and supporters who have and will again sustain our particular traditions in many commendable ways. I learned a great deal during my first year as president, and hope these experiences allow me amplify the goodwill, initiatives, and voices that were so palpable during our formal and casual conversations.