

RhetCanada President's Report 2026

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This past year gave us the biggest developments in RhetCanada's conference model during my time as president—and perhaps during the past couple decades—posing important questions for the future. Since Congress, our traditional hosts, could not offer hosting services in 2026, RhetCanada partnered with the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) to host our own conference in May at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, ON. Thanks to a successful SSHRC grant, a welcoming location, and most importantly, a wonderful team of organizers and presenters, this conference pulled out all the stops across five days of programming within and between associations, plus the launch of the Rhetoricon project. All of this proved that we are capable of running things independent of Congress and engaging in warm collaborations with other associations. Early in 2026, we also debuted the “Winter Showcase,” a one-day online conference in January, which addressed the desire to have more frequent connections among members. Since these two events broke our traditional molds, the future is a place of many possible conference models, and members have been surveyed to assess their preferences and feedback on our two 2026 events, and what they might look like going forward.

Before pondering this future, I would like to extend a mountain of thanks to the friends and colleagues who made this special year possible. The extra and extra-large events that RhetCanada put together in collaboration with CASDW, and on its own, actually demanded *less* effort on behalf of the president than previous conferences. Rency Luan took on an immense and immensely-appreciated role to coordinate the “Rhetoric, Writing, and Discourse Today” conference; Sara Humphreys worked tirelessly on the SSHRC grant; Sarah Banting artfully arranged everything with St. Jerome's, and initially suggested our collaboration (of course, these are just brief highlights of broader efforts). Within RhetCanada, Shannon Lodoen offered me extensive help and encouragement across an entire year of conference planning, and David Beard organized the Winter Showcase with apparent ease. It was a pleasure to work with Randy Harris around the Rhetoricon project. Kyle Gerber, Monique Kampher, and Bruce Dadey, three deeply loyal RhetCanada members, again supported our conferences in their official and unofficial capacities. I am grateful to Sean Zwagerman, the English co-editor of *Rhetor*, for his serious and ongoing efforts to publish research from this conference. All in all, I am indebted to numerous members of RhetCanada, CASDW, and the Rhetoricon group for their volunteering and enthusiastic participation—more than a hundred people who took a chance on this collaborative week of events.

So, what do we do next year? This is the main question that our recent survey probed. Members enjoyed the collaborative nature of the 2026 conference, and 75% indicated a preference for another CASDW collaboration instead of Congress. Although many said appreciative words about Congress, its proposed fee structure in 2027 struck people as prohibitive, and financial limits were often mentioned. Conceivably, when Congress's new model has been tested, and costs perhaps come down, members may want to return to it. Yet given that the CASDW collaboration succeeded with a low ticket price, it seems natural that members lean towards replicating and refining this known experience. I look forward to shaping it with our feedback.

In last year's report, I suggested two long term challenges facing RhetCanada: (1) managing the conference organizing workload, and (2) recruiting and retaining a healthy group of stable, core members, who can become future leaders of our association and/or set a high standard of research. Given the fantastic support we received last year in the collaboration, the first issue seems solvable if we can continue to find funds to pay a RA to handle certain key conference tasks. On the second point, I saw positive signs this year—but the long-term trend remains difficult to discern among the flux of attendees and the complex factors that nudge people towards submitting or not each January (eg. promotion, location, budgets, competing conferences, relevance, personal connections). We should work hard to promote our CFP through institutional and interpersonal networks, and warmly encourage newcomers to come back next year.

All in all, RhetCanada appears in good shape for the future. I look forward to my final conference as president, and then moving on to supporting the association in other ways, perhaps attending to those pesky side projects calling to me in the distance. We have a remarkable community of scholars, and I'm happy to serve a group that has significantly shaped me and that I continually observe nurturing so many others.