

Introduction to the Special Edition: The Roots and Branches of the Ohio Communication Association

Stefne Lenzmeier Broz

As the longest-serving editor of the *Ohio Communication Journal*, I am honored to contribute an introduction to this very special issue highlighting the valuable role of the Ohio Communication Association in the professional development of homegrown Communication scholars. As we celebrate the 80th anniversary of this organization's annual conference, this is a good opportunity to reflect on the many ways it has inspired and encouraged academics young and old to engage with their discipline at the local level. The talented and well-known scholars who have contributed essays to this volume offer compelling considerations of what OCA has meant to them personally and professionally while making a case for how and why all Ohio scholars can contribute to and benefit from this organization.

Dr. Jerry Feezel provides historical context for understanding how the Ohio Communication Association developed its mission and increased its influence through the careful work of dedicated colleagues. Dr. Jeffrey Tyus focuses on the significant value of the OCA conference in providing a showcase for undergraduate students' work and exposing them to the discipline early in their studies. Dr. Erin Hollenbaugh notes the importance of OCA experiences for graduate students who are seeking professional opportunities and experiences ahead of seeking employment in the discipline. Dr. Nicole Blau discusses

Stefne Lenzmeier Broz (Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 2003), is an Associate Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication at Wittenberg University.

the useful role that involvement in OCA can play early in a scholar's career, in terms of scholarship and leadership opportunities, to help build one's tenure case. Dr. Liane Gray-Starner and Cody Clemens explore the various ways that OCA contributes to pedagogy within our discipline. Dr. Adam Earnhardt challenges Ohio scholars to investigate the power of networks in promoting the discipline and the organization. Finally, Dr. Matthew Smith describes some of the many benefits OCA provides to Ohio scholars, suggesting a bright future for an organization that plays such a valuable role in developing scholars in our field.

As part of their discussion of these topics, our contributors to this special issue note their personal connection with the Ohio Communication Association and the annual conference, and my story is similar to many of theirs. I attended my first OCA conference in 2005 as part of a panel assembled and proposed by my fellow Wittenberg colleague Matthew Smith. The welcoming atmosphere and the strong communal belief in the value of this small organization led to my immediate involvement as I was asked to take on the role of Journal Manager for OCA's *Ohio Communication Journal*, and later to serve as an Editorial Board member. I continued to attend the annual conference, sometimes with students, and contribute in various ways. I also served as Co-Editor of the journal with Dr. Jason Wrench, and then as Editor. I value all of the people I have met along the way and all the things I have learned from them about being a good scholar and a good colleague.

Serving as Editor of *OCJ* for five years was highly rewarding. I had the privilege of reading over 150 manuscripts representing the hard work of colleagues from across the state and around the country. Each one was an important and humbling opportunity to help a scholar develop in some way. A noticeable number of the journal submissions had originated as presentations at the annual conference, where the author(s) received valuable feedback and encouragement; this further attests to the importance of this conference in the growth of the scholars who attend and present their work there. I am deeply grateful to all of the Editorial Board members who served, taking the time to provide careful and

constructive feedback as we sought to be good stewards of the journal and foster the development of quality scholarship.

I hope you enjoy reading the following essays as much as I did. And I hope you will continue to support the Ohio Communication Association in whatever ways you are able, to ensure it continues to play a valuable role in the development of Communication scholars in the state of Ohio and beyond.