

April 2, 2019

Dr. Star Muir, President  
National Communication Association  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Dr. Trevor Parry-Giles, Executive Secretary  
National Communication Association  
1765 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Star and Trevor:

Please share this letter with the members of the NCA Executive Committee.

During the past two weeks, since receiving Trevor's report of the action of the Executive Committee regarding the selection of Distinguished Scholars, we have had extensive online discussions among ourselves. The undersigned Distinguished Scholars write to share with you our concerns and to urge reconsideration by the EC.

First, we want to be sure you are aware of the concern this action has aroused among the Distinguished Scholars. Some object to the substance of the decision, some to the decision-making process, and some to both. Some have had intense reactions of anger and alienation toward NCA that have prompted them to write to you individually. A very substantial majority of the Distinguished Scholars join in the concerns expressed in this letter.

We are deeply disappointed that an important decision of this nature would be made in the absence of consultation with the Distinguished Scholars. The unilateral nature of the action is not in keeping with our Association's general commitment to participatory governance.

Your failure to consult with us makes it hard for us to avoid the implication that your action is a rebuke to the Distinguished Scholars, either because you think we do not share the commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity; or because you think we are not disposed to carry it out. Both implications are unwarranted and we find them offensive.

In fact, we share the commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, and we have discussed on various occasions how to tweak the nomination and selection processes to better fulfill those commitments. It was at our initiative that the nomination process was opened to all members of the Association a few years ago. At our meeting last year in Salt Lake City, surprised that very few members of NCA chose to submit nominations, we proposed a number of steps that we thought could be taken to enhance the diversity of the pool of nominees. We are frankly disappointed that the EC appears to have dismissed these proposals because, according to Trevor's report, they "felt" them to be inadequate.

We focused on the nominating process because our analysis indicated that the slow progress on enhancing diversity was primarily the result of the lack of nominations that would make the pool more diverse, not from the selection process for choosing the award recipients. It is a truism that people who are not nominated cannot be selected. Trevor's report indicates that the nomination

process will remain unchanged. If this is the case, we fear that even while offending the current Distinguished Scholars, the EC's actions will not solve the problem. We believe that the proposals advanced by the Distinguished Scholars in Salt Lake offer a better chance of doing so.

The claim that the new selection process will resemble that for other NCA awards is beside the point. The Distinguished Scholar Award was never intended to resemble other awards. What it does resemble is the process by which full professors are asked to be the evaluators of their colleagues who are candidates for tenure and promotion.

We also are concerned that the new plan will compromise the selection process itself. No scholarly credentials are stipulated for the members of the new selection committee to be chosen by the Leadership Development Council. The selection committee is then tasked to select a diverse group of scholars, not as the happy byproduct of a fair evaluation of all candidates in a rich pool but as an a priori instruction. This strikes us as a somewhat "ham-handed" way to try to achieve a worthy goal.

Finally, we are specifically concerned that the Executive Committee took this action without any consultation with the founder and principal donor of the Distinguished Scholar Award to ascertain his wishes in the matter. This action does not inspire confidence in NCA's stewardship of philanthropic gifts that it wishes to receive.

Most of us believe that there is a clear solution that would resolve these concerns: to restore the selection process that existed before the recent EC meeting, to take seriously the proposals advanced by the Distinguished Scholars in Salt Lake City, and to apologize to the Distinguished Scholars who have been alienated from the Association by the EC's actions. These steps could be taken at once so that the DS program in 2019 could proceed as in the past. Others of us believe that there is a need for additional conversations about the program in relation to the Association's diversity goals or about possible tweaks in voting procedures to make them more deliberative, and that these conversations will require additional time. In that case, the Distinguished Scholar Award should be put "on hiatus" until these matters are resolved.

Either of these approaches to a solution, in our view, would be preferable to the action taken by the Executive Committee, which in addition to its other problems seems to have been precipitous. We urge the EC to reconsider its recent action and instead to adopt one of these approaches, with the goal of achieving a mutually satisfactory solution.

Sincerely,  
(names listed alphabetically)

James R. Andrews	Frans H. van Eemeren	Peter R. Monge
Ronald C. Arnett	Carolyn S. Ellis	Dennis K. Mumby
Leslie A. Baxter	Robert M. Entman	Jon F. Nussbaum
Wayne Beach	Gail T. Fairhurst	Sandra Petronio
W. Lance Bennett	Mary Anne Fitzpatrick	Gerry F. Philipsen
Thomas W. Benson	Howard Giles	Marshall Scott Poole
Carole Blair	G. Thomas Goodnight	Linda L. Putnam

Arthur P. Bochner	Dennis S. Gouran	Michael E. Roloff
John Waite Bowers	Alan G. Gross	Edward Schiappa
Stephen H. Browne	Lawrence Grossberg	David R. Seibold
Judee K. Burgoon	Gerard A. Hauser	Herbert W. Simons
Patrice M. Buzzanell	Robert Hariman	Sandi W. Smith
Joseph N. Cappella	Roderick P. Hart	Cynthia Stohl
Donal Carbaugh	J. Michael Hogan	Mary E. Stuckey
Clifford G. Christians	Michael J. Hyde	Joseph Turow
Celeste M. Condit	Robert L. Ivie	Karen Tracy
Noshir Contractor	Kathleen Hall Jamieson	Anita L. Vangelisti
François Cooren	Mark L. Knapp	Joseph B. Walther
Robert T. Craig	Beverly Long Chapin	Ellen A. Wartella
John A. Daly	John L. Lucaites	Julia Wood
Stanley A. Deetz	Stephen Lucas	David Zarefsky
James Price Dillard	Martin J. Medhurst	Barbie Zelizer