

NCA 104th Annual Convention

Call for Participation

“Communication at Play”

November 8-11, 2018

Salt Lake City, Utah



The game is afoot! In 2018, the National Communication Association’s 104th Annual Convention will be held in scenic Salt Lake City, Utah. The convention theme, “Communication at Play,” is intentionally and playfully ambiguous. Imaginative, experimental, strategic, creative, and fun, play offers opportunities to discuss important aspects of communication, while also providing rich metaphorical resources for reconsidering the role and function of communication in breaking impasses, challenging cultural practice, providing perspective, and creating identifications through shared delight.

Dutch historian Huizinga wrote that “culture arises and unfolds in and as play,” and that the “great instinctive forces of civilized life,” including law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom, and science, are all “rooted in the primeval soil of play.” From his notion of “homo ludens” (humans as game players), play studies has evolved to include a wide variety of perspectives, disciplines, and traditions. Recreation, now a dominant feature of our digital milieu, is often rooted in environmental places and contested cultural spaces, and has tremendous economic, political, and social impact.

“Communication at Play” opens up this aspect of human life, while also offering a rich metaphorical array of language surrounding discovery, interaction, and sense-making: Guidelines for deploying communication strategically (playbook); contexts for experiment and innovation (playground); rules, referees, and power disparities (playing field); script, stage, and performance appreciation and criticism (“the play’s the thing”); training and learning strategies (play pedagogy); subversion and resistance (playing the fool); and so on.

In these interesting times, play is more than a trivial pursuit. Organizational cultures are beginning to recognize the value of play, including LEGO studies and improvisation, as strongly linked to problem solving and innovation. Play, as a process for transcendence, for unlimiting, for transformation, for unblocking elements at an impasse, for retaining sanity in an insane world, for maintaining learner interest and engagement, for solving intriguing mysteries and puzzles, and for staying mentally fit and living a balanced life, seems worthy of greater attention within the Communication discipline. It was Einstein who said that “Combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought.” There is also a dark side to play, involving restrictive frameworks, asymmetry, playing with prey, relational mind games, hyper-competitiveness, and incipient violence, and that merits further conversation as well.

This theme invites panels, proposals, performances, and submissions that 1) examine the nature of play and its role within communication frameworks and interactions, or 2) exhibit playfulness in shaping the experience of scholars coming together to address issues of common concern. Playing with process, with language, with culture, and with fellow scholars, teachers, and professionals—all are “fair game.”

The convention location will feature a spectacular view of the Wasatch mountains, and an array of interesting restaurants, historical sites, and outdoor experiences. Please come and join our play group!

Star Muir
NCA Second Vice President