

## QJS Edit 1 Transcript

Hello, welcome to this our NCA Editor Interview for the 96<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the National Communication Association. Today I am talking to Raymie McKerrow, who is of Ohio University and is the Editor Elect of Quarterly Journal of Speech.

**Raymie, how would you describe QJS and what are its aims and scopes? What's the range of issues and concerns that the journal aims to explore?**

Well first I would describe the journal as the premier humanistic journal, or otherwise referred to as the rhetoric journal, within the discipline of communication studies.

The second thing, with respect to what I expect to try to do or what I hope to try to do, I want this to be a journal where both, traditional scholars, who do more public address, kinds of research, as well as newer, critical scholars and those who are dealing with new areas, such as queer rhetoric, visual rhetoric etc, can find a home. So that it's not limited by virtue of topic or methodological approach, so long as it stays within the context of rhetorical theory and criticism.

The second thing that I would expect is to maintain the standard of quality within the journal. That means that essays need to rise to a fairly significant level, with respect to the contribution that they're making, either theoretically or critically or a combination of those two and those are the kinds of concerns that I then have is, how do I maintain that, with respect to the essays that we finally accept for publication?

The third thing I would say is, I also expect to maintain approximately a 10% acceptance rate. That means out of, say, 150 essays within a given year, I'm looking to publish somewhere around 15 to 20 of those across a volume. And that's been the history of the journal over the past several editors, with respect to quality, as well as a very stiff bar, a very high bar, if you will, in terms of acceptance rates.

**And what do you think are the most contentious issues and contemporary debate and research in communication studies, which the journal seeks to address?**

I think that some of the debates are what constitutes quality criticism and what constitutes quality theory, as it advances the discipline. One of the things that I'm currently seeing are authors who are moving forward with new conceptualisations and new ways of labelling particular areas, as they try to create more sub-fields within the discipline and I think there's a certain tension, with respect to how far we go, with respect to those kinds of labels. And the irony with respect to my own work in creating a label that has had some lasting power is not lost on me at all, but I think that's one of the tensions, is how far are we going towards creating new ways of talking about the same things we've been talking about and the second tension then is finding a home for new avant-garde topics or areas of research, whether that's queer rhetoric or something else that's not even yet on the horizon.

**So what do you look for when considering articles and submissions?**

Well the first thing I'm looking for is a very clearly written and well organised essay, that's the first standard, with a very clearly stated, what I call, 'reason for being', 'cause I don't pronounce French well, but if that sense of why is this essay here and why should the reader examine or read through the entire essay? So that's the first level of concern.

The second level of concern is, is this advancing theory in some particular way? One of the things that some authors are doing is they'll use a critical approach to the fact that the field has failed to do thus and such, and one of the things I see reviewers consistently then doing is saying, 'maybe they have, maybe they haven't,' but do you need that kind of negative appraisal as a foil for what you want to advance? Why not simply say, 'here's where I am, here's where the field is, here's where I wanna go,' in a more straightforward manner, rather than feeling as if one needs to criticise. So I think that's one of the things that I'm looking at, in terms of, do we want to move in that negative direction or do we want to try to publish essays that take a much more positive view of where they want to go, without feeling that they need to say, 'the field is being negligent thus far and not doing thus and such.' That's another approach that I think we're seeing much more.

And the third thing, which is really difficult to describe is simply quality research and quality theorising and critical assessment of whatever it is an author is examining. That's a judgement call on the part of reviewers and it's a judgement call on my part and it's not something that you can say, 'this is it and that isn't,' and you can very clearly discriminate the difference between the two. Sometimes you can, sometimes it's much more ineffable.

### **So what are your aspirations for the future of the journal?**

Well my aspirations are to do a quality job. It's a very nerve-racking position to be in, within respect to the fact that I'm also a gatekeeper and if I'm maintaining an acceptance rate of two essays out of every 20, roughly, that means I'm writing 18 rejection letters out of every 20 essays and one of my hopes is, at the end of the three years, to look back on it and have authors say, 'I was treated fairly and humanely,' because we are in the business of affecting people's careers with the decisions that we make. So that's one very personal hope for the journal and hope for my editorship, is that I maintain the quality control, at the same time, manage to work with authors in ways that are humane.

What I'm doing, even with letters of rejection, is I'm either sending back a marked copy of the text, which means I've read it as well and I can't read it as carefully as some of our content experts because the essays are not in my own area of expertise, but I can tell how an argument is constructed and can suggest ways to improve the structure and the style of the essay. And so that's a commitment I'm making, is to make sure that I know what I'm thinking about that essay, at the same time that others are telling me, either to reject it or it's a major revision. If I get two major revisions back from the reviewers, I may reject the essay or move it forward to re-submission and that's a judgement call that I'm willing to make. In other words, I'm not following lock-step necessarily in every case what the reviewers are telling me I should do. Often times I'm getting minor revision and either major revision or reject. In other words, the two reviewers have very different views of the essay and so I feel I have to know what I think about the essay, in order to make a judgement call.

### **How do you see communication studies developing in the future? Are there any particular areas that you feel will come to the forefront of the debate, you mentioned queer studies, for example?**

I think that's moving forward with both new books coming out and new essays coming out. I would like to see QJS become one of the homes for that kind of research, as it fits into our standards. It's hard to tell what the new areas are going to be. I'm reading a lot of very ... what I would call, typical work, with respect, that I

would expect to get, on say, President Obama and political issues, but I'm also getting new work on economics and rhetoric, on Marxism and rhetoric, on military blogging and blogging as a particular tool of discourse. So these are new areas, for me at least, that I'm seeing coming across into the journal for consideration. So it's really difficult to tell what the newest areas are.

We are a field that borrows and my sense is that we will see essays that begin to involve new philosophers that haven't been given much space, if you will, or haven't been discussed to a great extent in the journal. So I think that's the other direction that we'll probably continue to go and I see new philosophers for NCA, for example, with issues of decent, related to issues of democracy; those are the kinds of things that may come to the fore, but it's hard to tell. I just try to do some predictions in the review essay on rhetoric that I did and I don't know if those predictions are any more accurate than what I've just said.

**How do you think QJS addresses the conference theme and helps to build to bridges?**

I think that's an importance conference theme for the journal, as well as for the field, because what we are trying to do is make sure, because we are a very diverse and divergent field, that both bridges are built between and among the various divisions and areas within the discipline, as well as building bridges across to other disciplines and illustrating the communication has something to bring to the table, with respect to issues that are being discussed in political science or in history, in sociology, in psychology etc. So building bridges is, I think, a uniquely fitting theme for where we are at the present time.

**How do you feel the NCA journals benefit the membership of NCA?**

I think what the journals do is, both at the national level and also at the regional level, is they provide an outlet for scholars who want to investigate new questions and might take on research, as it doesn't get done unless someone is curious about issues or feels that something shouldn't be the way it currently is and they want to investigate it. So that research happens because of a personal drive of the individual scholar and what the journals do is provide an outlet for that curiosity to come to fruition and to test ideas and arguments against one's peers and that's one of the reasons for peer review, in terms of, does this particular essay pass muster with respect to the standards of the particular journal that it's being submitted to and essays that I might reject may be perfectly good essays published in another outlet that is more appropriate for the nature of the argument or the breadth or significance of the argument that they're making. What I think the journals do, at the varying levels from national to regional, is provide an outlet for quality scholarship, irrespective of the journal that the work is being published in.

**Well thanks for your time today Raime. I've really enjoyed talking to you and I hope everyone's enjoyed listening. If people would like to find out more about QJS and the NCA journals in general, they can go to [www.communcaitonarena.com](http://www.communcaitonarena.com).**

[Recording ends]/