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REFLECTIONS AND EPIPHANIES

Papers From the Plenary Session of the 2003
Association for Business Communication Convention

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The Association for Business Communication's (ABC's) 68th annual convention was convened in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Our traditional opening plenary session featured presentations from Donna Kienzler, ABC's 2002 recipient of the Meada Gibbs Outstanding Teaching Award, and James Suchan, recipient of the Outstanding Researcher Award. For use in this Forum, Donna and James were kind enough to convert to writing their respective presentations.

Each year, ABC invites the past year's award winners to address the membership. ABC extends such an invitation because the award winners represent what is valued most—excellence in teaching and significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the business communication discipline. This public address allows the award winners an opportunity to reflect on their many years of experience and expertise as scholars. Their charge is to offer candid stories about the challenges they have faced as professionals. These stories, in turn, are expected to provoke dialogue about issues that might matter to us as business communication educators and researchers.

Donna Kienzler chose to talk about ethics—the theme for the convention as well as a topic that she has taught, wrestled with, and written about for the past several years. She draws us in by offering all-too-familiar ethical teaching dilemmas that have faced her through the years. As a means of solving those dilemmas, she offers an array of ethics theories only to demonstrate complexities that defy easy answers.

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In the end, she challenges us to examine our own ethics and their effects on our students and ourselves.

Jim Suchan's story traces his journey as an academic from his Ph.D. in English literature to his appointment at a business school. He shares his struggles with fitting in as a writer/researcher in our field as he chronicles his search for identity and authenticity. What makes the story all the more interesting is the parallel struggle for identity that has beleaguered the field of business communication. Jim's point, however, is captured in his title, "Why I Write and You Should, Too." His address challenges members to engage in writing and confronts business communication journal editors to broaden their genres, allowing for more experimental and creative forms of knowledge creation.

For those of you who attended the plenary session, you know that Jim and Donna were masterful in provoking thought and discussion. The audience was fully engaged in lively debate, and the dialog about the provocative ideas presented went on well after the close of the session. In fact, conversations about their presentations were ongoing throughout the duration of the convention.

For those of you who were unable to attend the session, I invite you to read the articles that follow and join us in the dialogue that surrounds these important and timely issues.

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