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A Cancelled Conference and Community Care

4/22/2020

By Rachel Bloom-Pojar

Greetings from a socially-distant Milwaukee. Our city and lives have taken quite a different turn since our last post. By now we had hoped to welcome so many teachers, students, writers, and researchers to our wonderful city of Milwaukee for the 2020 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). We all have experienced a huge shift in our daily lives since the start of March, and we hope you are staying home, healthy, and safe amid these uncertain times. While everyone on our local arrangements' team agreed that cancelling the conference was for the best, it still was quite a disappointment that we couldn't see this experience come to fruition—one that we started preparing for last summer. For a few weeks now, I have wanted to write a post about all of the amazing local work that went into preparing for Cs because my students, colleagues, and our community partners did so much to make this conference one that would have been truly special. Today, I write to share a small snapshot of that local work along with a note for moving forward here at Writing & Rhetoric MKE.

A Note of Thanks and an Invitation

There are many people to thank for all of the work that went on behind the scenes locally for this great conference-that-never-was. I want to take a moment to thank some of those people and to invite you to spend time with the webpages and resources that were put together with a deep attention to access, inclusion, and local communities. I want to first thank my colleague and friend, Maria Novotny, for everything she did as the [Local Arrangements Committee](#) (LAC) chair to plan and coordinate an excellent conference that would have [highlighted the diverse community organizations and initiatives](#) happening around our city. I also want to thank my fellow LAC sub-committee chairs, Lilly Campbell, Margaret Fink, and Heidi Rosenberg, and all of their volunteers for putting in the time and effort to prepare for this conference. We are especially grateful to Margaret, the Accessibility Committee, and the members of the CCCC Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition for their fantastic [accessibility guide](#). Please read through that if you haven't already done so. It is full of great advice and details that, while specific to what 4C20 would have been in Milwaukee, anyone attending or planning for a conference should be familiar with to make their gatherings more accessible. It can also serve as a set of resources for navigating accessibility around downtown Milwaukee. I hope you have had the chance to browse all of the detailed content on our [VisitingMKE](#) pages that were put together thanks to the tireless time and efforts of Lilly's Information, Hospitality, and Special Events/Services committee. Finally, I want to thank the CCCC American Indian Caucus, Andrea Riley Mukavetz, Margaret Noodin, and Chloe Smith for putting together our [Land/Water Acknowledgement](#) and best practices for utilizing that.

I also want to express my deepest gratitude to the [editorial team](#) for this blog: Danielle Koepke, Chloe Smith, and Madison Williams. The time and labor they poured into planning, designing, writing, and editing the [4C20 pages](#) went above and beyond what was asked of them as LAC

volunteers. Meeting on a weekly basis since summer 2019, coordinating with other LAC sub-committees to assemble content, and responding to requests from various stakeholders each week on top of the demands of their own graduate coursework and family lives leaves me incredibly proud and grateful for their dedication to this project.

Where do we go from here?

Right before our hiatus on blog posts, we had started rolling out a series of posts written by LAC members for CCCC visitors: a [Newcomer's Guide to CCCC, sober options](#) for socializing around the city, [vegan-friendly](#) dining options, [new features and events](#) for 4C20, the [Milwaukee Public Library and local bookstores](#), and [brewery tours](#). The editorial team kicked off this series by [sharing highlights](#) from the resources and webpages they worked on with other local arrangements' volunteers over the past year to help visitors navigate the city and conference. We had a few more blog posts on local dining, community spaces, and LGBTQ+ friendly establishments that we hope to post once we are on the other side of Wisconsin's safer-at-home order and people are able to visit these businesses and organizations again. These web pages and blog posts were always one part of a larger project and blog: Writing & Rhetoric MKE. So, as we had planned to do after the conference, we now look forward to returning to the work of #writingmke.

What does a website dedicated to highlighting community spaces and practices do while we are in a time of a global pandemic and "social distancing?" We hope to highlight how community practices of writing, rhetoric, and care are still happening in this uncertain and challenging time. If you would like to submit a blog post about how you're connecting with others across Milwaukee, how your organization is using writing and/or rhetoric to bring people together, and/or what challenges have surfaced for everyday writing, rhetoric, and literacy practices, please consider submitting a blog post. You can read more about submission details [here](#). This includes a special call for UWM graduate teaching assistants to share stories of adjusting to remote instruction, homeschooling children, navigating "quarantine" and social distancing in the city, and more.

As we move forward with this blog amid an ever-changing landscape with Covid-19, we hope to highlight stories of people, places, and organizations that demonstrate what has defined Milwaukee for many years: resilience in challenging times. We have already seen multiple examples of peoples' resilience and determination, from [showing up to vote and voicing concerns for public health](#) in our recent primary election to translating Coronavirus information and addressing food insecurity on the South Side with [Ayuda Mutua MKE](#). We will continue to see how **writing** (social media, texts, news reports, and more) and **rhetoric** (i.e. demands to "reopen" the economy or persuading people to support local food banks) remain central to navigating daily life amid this pandemic. Whether local in Milwaukee or across the country, we will only get through this by recognizing our interdependence, making connections with others, and continuing to care for our communities.

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