

Report of the AFA Research Committee
Chicago | November 2004

The committee conducted its business electronically in anticipation of the fall meeting.

We are pleased to announce the following winners of the AFA research awards. Please note that the Wayne Brockriede Memorial Research Program Grant is not scheduled to be awarded until the 2005 cycle.

The winner of the **AFA Dissertation Award** is **Doyle Srader**. His dissertation was defended in 2003 and is entitled "The Nuremberg Doctors' Trial: Framing Collective Memory Through Argument." The Nuremberg trials included proceedings against twenty-three physicians and support staff who participated in medical experiments on concentration camp inmates. In addition to sixteen guilty verdicts the process yielded the Nuremberg code, which to this day is a founding document in biomedical ethics. Srader's argument is that this document did not settle the issues surrounding ethical research, but stands as a marker of the still-contested issues in the field and reconfigured the possibility for deliberation regarding global medicine. One of his nominators praised the project for pointing argumentation studies more fully in international directions. The dissertation was written for Srader's degree work at the University of Georgia, and was directed by Ed Panetta. The other committee members were Celeste Condit, Thurmon Garner, Thomas Lessl, and Dean Rojak (a University of Georgia sociologist). Congratulations to Prof. Srader for his work, which fully merits the AFA's dissertation honors.

The winners of the **AFA Daniel Rohrer Research Award**, which recognized outstanding scholarship in forensics and argumentation produced in the previous calendar year (2003) are **William Benoit, Glenn Hansen, and Rebecca Verser**, all associated with the University of Missouri - Columbia, for their essay "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Viewing the U.S. Presidential Debates." This work appeared in the December 2003 *Communication Monographs* (70.4: 335-350). Benoit is Professor of Communication at Missouri; Hansen and Verser are doctoral candidates there. For many years Prof. Benoit's work on presidential debating has contributed productive and insightful analysis of the discursive dynamics of political argumentation. This essay asks what we know about the role of debates in shaping issue knowledge, issue salience, voter preferences, perceptions of candidate competence. Benoit, Hansen, and Verser confirmed work establishing that primary debates have more significant effects than general election debates, and that first debates matter more than subsequent ones. The methodological design was sophisticated (18 datasets involving 7202 subjects were aggregated), skillfully blends quantitative and qualitative approaches to the analysis of public argument to produce recommendations for future research, and successfully engages difficult analytical matters (e.g., the fact that voters who view debates may be self-selectedly more interested in the political process is a moderating variable that can bedevil work on this topic). Congratulations to Dr. Benoit, Mr. Hanse, and Ms. Verser for their outstanding work.

The committee continues to discuss **other issues** relating to its standing charge and to important questions posed to it by the organization's leadership:

How shall the Association better recognize lifetime academic achievement in argumentation scholarship? Lifetime achievement is difficult to judge, of course, and the possibility of dedicating special issues of *Argumentation & Advocacy* (perhaps on a biennial basis) to essays exploring the work of specific scholars would productively highlight their accomplishments.

How shall the Association better publicize its research awards? This remains a continuing challenge, since the normal mechanisms of publicity (listserv announcements, letters to graduate directors heading programs involving argumentation and forensics work, etc.) continue to yield a fairly low though high quality pool of research. The committee has discussed the possibility of automatically nominating work produced by members in *A&A*, and is also considering an expanded list of journals whose essays by members might be automatically nominated (e.g., *Controversia*, *Argumentation*, *The Forensic*, *Informal Logic*, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*). A challenge is "where to draw the line," since, for example, all the NCA journals publish work that might rightly be considered argumentation research.

How shall Association awards distinguish among categories of research? Some discussion continues on the question of whether the review process should distinguish forensics work from other sorts of argumentation scholarship, and whether book projects are to be handled in reviewing.

The committee welcomes broader input on these questions for the purpose of bringing substantive recommendations to the 2005 Boston meeting.

Submitted by *David Cheshier* (Assoc Prof, Georgia State University), Committee Chair, on behalf of the Research Committee.