

KairosCast, Episode 6, Transcript

<intro music>

Courtney Danforth: Welcome to KairosCast.

Harley Ferris: Welcome to KairosCast.

<music continues>

Harley: Welcome back to KairosCast.

Courtney: Welcome back to KairosCast. I'm Courtney Danforth.

Harley: And I'm Harley Ferris. And we're glad you're joining us for Episode 6.

Courtney: In this episode, we're looking forward to the Computers & Writing Conference at the end of May.

Harley: And at least for me, I really am looking forward to it. This is, this is absolutely my favorite conference, hands down.

Courtney: And it will be my first attempt at the conference, but I'm sure it will become my favorite as well.

Harley: Of course it will. I promise. That's a sincere promise. So, as far as going to conferences, some people love them, and some people don't love them so much. Where do you fall in this spectrum, Courtney?

Courtney: I am not a big fan. I find them exhausting, and I miss my dog.

Harley: That's fair. Um, I don't see many dogs at conference. But I love conferences. I don't know--for me, they're just kind of like vacations. I love being able to go to a different part of the country and, you know, hang out with people that I only get to see once or twice a year, and just get a different viewpoint, sort of, both of where I am and also maybe where the field is. And I feel like Computers & Writing, um, I don't know... It's an exciting group of people who are interested in exciting things. So I'm sure it has a lot to do with my own areas of interest, but I do think it's a special group.

Courtney: Well, I can't wait to see how things go. Looking forward to it.

Harley: Well, speaking of looking forward to conferences and how we might approach them, we had a great chat with Brian Croxall, didn't we?

Courtney: We sure did. He wrote a great post on Prof Hacker about hacking conferences back in 2009, and so we asked him to speak to us about how to get the most out of conferences.

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Brian Croxall: So I'm Brian Croxall. I'm currently the digital humanities strategist and lecturer of English at Emory University, although this summer, in July of 2015, I'm going to be moving to Brown University where I'll be the digital humanities librarian there. I've been a writer at Prof. Hacker since the blog started in 2009. I like to think about how to use technology in my teaching and how to foreground a lot of the work we do in the university that we don't often talk about. That was one of the goals of Prof. Hacker was to say explicitly the things that are often sort of assumed and general knowledge but that nobody ever teaches you in grad school or when you're a beginning assistant professor.

Courtney: Well, I guess conference-going probably hasn't changed all that much since 2009, so do your tips still stand or is everything all different now?

Brian: Well, they've changed a fair amount. I mean, they've changed more in the last five years than probably than they did in the previous thirty to thirty-five years, it would be my guess (not actually being that old). There has been some change but largely still the same.

Courtney: So what's new?

Brian: I think the biggest change is that most conferences I go to have very much embraced social media. The MLA is a good example. The MLA has a hashtag for the conference and then they encourage people to use it, to use Twitter, and then they also have a practice established of using hashtags for each individual session. In the 2008 MLA, there was a panel I presided on about Twitter and it was the sort of first official MLA conversation about Twitter. And we had a hashtag for that panel, but the following year the MLA had taken it on for itself. The MLA also uses Flickr and a lot of other tools. Every conference is aware that Twitter is something that they should be doing. You know we've also come a ways from--I think it was about two years ago, the hashtag was #TwitterGate at which people were still sort of upset that people were tweeting conference presentations and I think people in academia as a whole have moved to a place where it's really sort of expected that what you say in a conference, unless you specifically ask not to have it shared on social media, that your thoughts and ideas will be broadcast outside of the room. And so that's a real change from how academia has done conferences prior to the last five years.

Harley: My first conference as a grad student was Computers & Writing in Ann Arbor. I think that was 2011, maybe. And I was blown away by how people were using Twitter, primarily Twitter, to keep conversations going, to inform people in other sessions what's happening in theirs, and there was a panel on blogging where at some point somebody just raised their hand and said, "Can we put the backchannel on the screen? This is great." And so they actually put the Twitter feed on the screen and it got incorporated into the discussion, into the Q&A after the session and so I've always been a huge fan of using that.

Then I go to a different conference. Pulled out my smartphone. And had a stage whisper from the woman next to me say, "That's very distracting!". And so I just sort of sheepishly stuck that back in. What are your thoughts on the backchannel? Is it simply a matter of knowing the room? Or, I don't know, what do you think?

Brian: In 2011 we were still kind of making fun of Twitter. Gary Trudeau ran a whole thing in 2009 about how stupid Twitter was within Doonesbury. But around 2011 or so, people more

started to get it. But it is important to know the room. At a conference like Computers & Writing, there are going to be more people that are participating in a backchannel and understand what that's about. You do need to have a sense of what's happening at the conference but I really do think these days that most people expect to have what they're saying broadcast. And people should feel free to say to an audience, "You know, I'd rather this not be shared; it's something that's so nascent that I'm not ready for it to go outside of this room," and then people should absolutely respect that.

One of the things that's interesting is that the backchannel hasn't changed a whole lot in five, six years. You know, people still are using Twitter, sort of broadcasting what is being said and then sort of responding to each other or sometimes supplementing it. You know, questions coming in or additional links and information about a particular subject. They can be very rich. But the backchannel is there. It's always been there, even when we didn't have social media, it was somebody leaning over and whispering to the person next to him or her what they thought. Now they can just whisper and everyone can see it and hopefully they're not being nasty or mean-spirited when they're whispering.

Yeah, it's there, and so use it to your advantage. Have a Twitter handle or some URL for yourself on slides so people can give you credit and you can get more people knowing about you and the work that you're doing.

Courtney: Since we're talking about presentations, I wonder what advice you have for question and comment periods for moderators, presenters, and audience-members. How can we make the most of that opportunity?

Brian: So, I think it's important as a presider in a session to try and give everyone on a panel an opportunity to say something more or to respond to each other. At the same time, it's also important that the audience get a chance to ask questions. So I think it can be important for a presider to try and interpose him- or her-self to take on that role of presiding or recognizing how many questions are in the room and trying to help everyone understand you're going to try and get to as many people as possible.

I think as a panelist--a great Prof. Hack--I often don't answer the question that I'm asked; I answer the question I wish they would have asked me. There's this funny thing about interviews or questions, and you hear this all the time on NPR, when politicians are interviewed. You can ask somebody a direct question, and if they choose not to answer it, you can ask them again, and if they still won't answer it, that's basically it. You don't get to point out to them, like, "You're not answering my question!". As a conference presenter, you can do that sometimes. You don't have to have to answer every question. You can say, like, "You know, that's really interesting, maybe we can talk some more after this and I can get some ideas from you or what to read to address that question; it's not something I've thought of."

I think as an audience member, I personally am guilty of sometimes making a comment more than a question, but it's often that I'll say, "What you said made me think about this thing--this sort of nexus of ideas--and I feel like there's more to say there and I kinda want you to say something about it but I don't know how to ask you because I don't know what I want to hear." If you can put it in a question, that's great. If you can't, try to be as succinct as possible so that the time can move around the room.

Those all seem commonsensical, but it turns out that common sense flies out the window a lot of times at conferences.

Harley: Sure, sure. Good point. You've got to be good citizens as well.

Courtney: It sounds like the key to the question issue is to keep in mind that the purpose of the question period is to encourage the speaker to say more. Whether you're doing that in the form of a comment or in a direct question, the goal is not to spotlight yourself, but to give them the opportunity for an encore.

Brian: Yeah, I think that's a great way of putting it. And it can be an encore again where you're calling something into question but you're not--you should not--you know, be out for blood in that venue. Prompt them. Point out that you think that maybe they should think a little more about this one thing, and maybe they have and it didn't get into the paper. What would they say about this? Rather than pulling out the scripture and verse and pounding them to death with it.

Courtney: <laughs> Way back when, when I was doing digital library work myself, it was the days of Palm Pilots and I remember people standing around at conferences and we got that new feature where you could beam your contact information to somebody else's Palm Pilot. We were all being very dorky, standing around conference halls, beaming our information around and very excited to leave our business cards behind for good. So, what is the status now? What is the personal communication data exchange protocol currently? Or what would you like it to be?

Brian: Gosh. You know, I don't want to give most people my phone number. Like, I don't want to send somebody my contact information to their phone because most of the time they don't need to call me. And it turns out that Google works pretty well. If you want to find me, and I, admittedly, have a less common last name, so it makes it easier to find me. But I think a business card works really well, and, but a business card with a URL for your website and your email address... I'm not sure what else you need. Most of my professional colleagues I never talk to on the phone and I guess sharing contact information, I get their email address.

I've found in international conferences it is important to have my business cards with me. For example, I preside at a session at a conference in Switzerland in this last year and a member of the panel was from Japan, and it was clearly an important cultural thing that, when I showed up, she presented me with her business card, and then I pulled one out to exchange with her as well. And so, in particular cultural contexts, that exchange of information matters in ways--it exceeds the bounds of just simply exchanging information. There's something to perform and do. And that's probably a useful tip to know if you are going to an international conference. When I spoke once in Trinidad, I was the keynote speaker at an event and it became very clear, right before I was to speak, that I had no idea how I was supposed to open my talk. Because the people introducing me were using very sort of formal language about... they were addressing the president of the university and the provost and you know, "to the honorable so and so and the assembled...". And I suddenly realized that I was in a context where I didn't have the language or tools and I was glad that I saw someone introduce the person who introduced me. And so I saw two of

these and so I was able to wing it when I got up there and nobody told me that I did a bad job. I'm sure I didn't do it perfectly right. But if you are going to a different context than what you're used to, asking about the protocols for meeting people, for how one addresses an audience, I think those things really do matter.

Back to the information. I do think a business card is great to have, and maybe I'm naive, but I think most people will be able to find you otherwise.

Courtney: Certainly for many conferences, we already have a shared context of a field of scholarship to work from. You should be able to google that, right?

Brian: Yeah. You know, that's what I do when I'm trying to find out who a speaker is or his or her information. I look for last name and university. And, between those two things I might not find their preferred method of contact, but I'll get something. So I think the main thing is, it's just really important that people know who you are. When you stand up to ask a question, if you're not, if you don't know the panelists, introduce yourself. You know, "I'm Brian Croxall from Emory University. Here's my question." That can be a great way so everyone in the room knows who you are and the person can sort of slot you into a place and that can be a useful thing to perform in that setting.

Harley: Well then the last question came out, for me anyway, came out after previous Cs in Indiana. There was a lot of conversation on listservs and Twitter about "People, stop reading your presentations." And after about a day and a half of, or probably not even that, probably half a day of a lot of people, 'Hear, hear!', then some other folks started hopping in, particularly from disability community saying for some people, reading is a non-... you have to read, because of distraction, because of anxiety, for whatever reason, and then many folks were quick to point out, "yeah, you know, I've actually seen many poorly performed conferences that could have been saved by reading a script." I guess my take on it has been perform a script rather than read a paper. What are your thoughts on that?

Brian: You know, this is a hard thing because a lot of times our arguments are balanced so finely on small things that, if we don't put it in a particular way, it might be wrong, it's not even that it might be misconstrued. Derrida wrote the way he did because he had to. Which doesn't forgive anyone in the 80s for continuing to try to write like Derrida because most of them didn't have to.

Harley: <laughs>

Brian: But. So I think there's a reason people like to write them out. Bill Pannacker in the Chronicle a couple of years ago had an article in the Chronicle Review or something about how academia is this profession where people have to veer very widely between being an extrovert at a conference and being an introvert, which is what you do most of the time. So a lot of people who go into academia, the public performance is not something that they want to do, it's not what they went into academia for. It's a sort of necessary evil. It's something they have to do. It's important to understand that and recognize that that person who is literally reading his paper off of the page in front of you might have made that choice because the argument might need to be expressed this way or they really didn't want to sign up for this but they know it's what they have to do. So I think that's important.

That said, the more we can be performers, the better it will be. My practice these days for talks is I write in bullet points for talks and I tend to use a lot of slides and I highlight in yellow the words where I'm going to hit the slide. And I'm, at this point, pretty practiced doing it, at writing talks, so I know what works for me. I think that's an important thing is to understand what works for you--what will make you feel best about the talk--and make you feel comfortable going into it.

But also recognize that rehearsing, rehearsing is something I don't do much anymore, but for my first several years, six? seven? years in academia, I would always do a read-through of my talks before hand, at least one, and I discovered that the way I wrote tended to be broken into lots of parentheticals or asides, that if you were reading it on paper, you could hold those things in your head, but since you couldn't see my punctuation if I was speaking to you, I didn't communicate very clearly taking my written language and trying to just say it aloud.

And so I discovered that, in the process of rehearsing, I would find these moments in which I could tell that I'd probably lose people, and I would have to restructure that written language into something... in those cases I was reading. Now I work off of my iPad when I give talks. At that point I was using paper, and I actually wrote stage directions for myself at different parts on it. I would say, "quote" so that people would know I was saying a direct quote or something like that.

So that's something that, whether you need to, for reason of disability, or for your own comfort or for your preference or for your argument, whether you need to read from a script, I think it's important to recognize that it will be read aloud and that the way that your audience will understand your argument. It's not the same thing as reading an essay in a print journal. And so trying to just make sure your language is understandable as a spoken presentation because that's what it will be.

My personal preference is for people to perform as much as possible because I have a short attention span and I like to be entertained. I think many of us know that, whether we like it or not, our students pay more attention if we are somewhat entertaining when we teach in the classroom. I sometimes wonder whether we care more about what our students think than our colleagues who, eventually, are promoting us and doing other things on our behalf. Those are the people that I really want to think well of me. I like to be thought well of by my students but I really want to impress Colleague X at University Y. Trying to do as good a job as possible, but understanding that there are different ways that people do their best job possible.

Courtney: We are out of time, Brian, but I want to give you an opportunity to say anything we haven't asked you about. Do you have any personal missions that you would like to see people accomplish in the world of academic conference going?

Brian: Oh gosh. This is my big chance. Conferences are the place where so much interesting stuff happens in academia. It's where we're trying out new things. It's where we're running into each other. And I just think the more we share about that work with a broader public, the better we are. So much of the time people don't understand what it is we do, and so conferences, because again you have the opportunity to take something out of its written form and perform it in some way for an audience, there's a good chance it can

reach out to a wider public as well. I think it's important to come back and I like to put all my talks on my blog so that the wider world can see what I'm doing. I imagine the wider world really isn't paying much attention, but I think it's a good opportunity to, when we have come part of the way out of speaking or writing in our very jargonistic language, which I think is less of a problem for people going to Cs than people who, like me who spent too much time with Derrida, that it's, since we've already had to do some translation work, we may as well make use of that translated material that's been made more accessible and do something more with it.

<segue music>

Harley: Well I really enjoyed that conversation, and if you want more from Brian, we're going to put the Prof Hacker link in the links section of our episode, so you'll be able to find that article and read it in full.

Courtney: And we encourage you to do so; it's a great post.

Harley: It really is. And so now, moving from thinking about just how do we handle conferences in general in this sort of big picture look toward, eh, moving toward something that's maybe a little more specific to our field, we put a call out and just asked a few of our friends, other people in the field, how they approach conferences. And they graciously responded with some short pieces.

<segue music>

Kris Blair: Hi, I'm Kris Blair from Bowling Green State University, and I'm going to focus on the Computers & Writing Conference, because for me Computers & Writing is a high energy, professional experience that begins as soon as I arrive on Wednesday afternoon and right up to the moment I leave on Sunday. I've been going to C&W for over 20 years, and the great thing about the conference is that, compared to 4Cs or MLA, it's obviously smaller and easier to engage new and established scholars in smaller group conversation and potentially form meaningful collaborations after the conference as a result. So here's some things I try to do to navigate or "do" Computers & Writing.

The first thing I try to do is just to be social. I'm naturally a bit shy, believe it or not, but I always find a way to make it to the evening events: the Wednesday celebration of the Ride 2 C&W, which is a great fundraiser that brings the community together; the Thursday evening reception; and things like the Friday evening karaoke, if they happen to have one on a particular year. This way I get to see good colleagues in relaxed environments, but I also get to meet new people, too, especially graduate students.

Another thing I try to do is definitely follow the Twitter feed, particularly for keynotes. I think it's a great way to keep up with and be part of the dialogue, and certainly do that for sessions I'm not able to attend. And people who can't attend the conference seem to really appreciate it, and so do the individuals whose sessions you live tweet. So for me it's a great form of networking and resource sharing during and after the conference.

Because I've been attending the conference for so long, I take it for granted that Computers & Writing is a definitely welcoming space for newcomers, and I truly believe that. But I

realize that newcomers don't always see it that way. They may be as shy as I feel in those public arenas, and so it's important for me to walk that talk of being a good colleague and being a good mentor. So I definitely try to reach out through events like the GRN, where I'm regularly a discussion leader, or participating in the job market workshop, and to definitely overall be present in the life of the conference from the beginning to the end.

Michael Day: Hey, Computers & Writing chatterbots! I'm Michael Day from Northern Illinois University. When I think about the best strategies for participating in conferences, I'm reminded of the motto that Becky Rickly, Eric Crump, and I had back in the early '90s when we were scared grad students attending 4Cs and Computers & Writing for our first times. "Schmooze it or lose it," was our motto, and we tried to stick together to support each other when we wanted to go up and meet celebrities in our field. So take advantage of any mentoring opportunities offered by the conference. Or find a conference buddy to co-mentor at the conference. Don't be afraid of going up to complete strangers and introducing yourself. It's a tradition in the Computers & Writing community, and those of us who were richly mentored in the past are just jumping at the bit to get an opportunity to meet and talk to you. Go bowling, go out on the outing, go to sessions, and get involved. Conspire with others. Invite people to collaborate on projects, and be as outgoing as you can. I certainly don't regret having been a "super schmoozola" for all of my 26 years of attending Computers & Writing, and you shouldn't either.

Cindy Selfe: Hi there! My name is Cindy Selfe, and I teach at Ohio State University, and I try and approach conferences as if they're going to be great vacations. So lots of pleasurable planning, great anticipation, and a long-lived love of hotels. And when I get to the conference, I enjoy going to sessions and learning things--that's a great pleasure--but I also enjoy simply sitting down with old friends and new friends and exchanging ideas. I love the people at C&W because they're my kind of peeps.

<segue music>

Harley: That was fun--you know, I really like that format, that short format like that. Our Chatter.

Courtney: I do, too. And I hope more people participate in future chatter segments. We'll be sure to put out calls for participation on our Twitter feed.

Harley: Absolutely. Let's talk with Trauman again. I always enjoy talking with Trauman, and Trauman drove me to my first Computers & Writing. We're going to talk about that in just a little bit.

<segue music>

Harley: We had a great chat with Brian Croxall about his article and his approach to conferences, and it was really nice for a very large, broad look at conferencing. But I also really want to make sure we chat about what makes C&W special, because that really points to what I think is super important and why I go to conferences--it's not so much about the presentations, but it's about the networking, it's about wandering around the book room, it's about, you know, eating meals with people who I've not yet gotten to chat with, or whatever. So I'm excited about all that stuff, and I think C&W, you know, through some of

the things like the bowling night and the karaoke and all that kind of stuff is, um... They have some traditions that really facilitate a lot of interesting connections that other conferences don't seem to do, so...

Courtney: Wait--are you serious? There's a bowling night?

Trauman: Oh yeah!

Harley: Yeah, there's traditionally bowling and karaoke.

Courtney: <laughs> It's like summer camp!

<laughter>

Courtney: Alright, so I have to ask: what are your go-to karaoke tunes, you guys?

Trauman: Well, lemme go first, because I've never done karaoke at, uh, nor have I done the bowling night, believe it or not, at Computers & Writing. But, were I to do a karaoke night, my two songs would be "Islands In The Stream," probably sung with Harley, or someone of that ilk, and "So Lonesome I Could Cry."

Courtney: Aw, that's one of my favorite songs of all time.

Harley: Those are great, classic songs.

Trauman: Mm-hmm. And I yodel when I do it.

Courtney: Do you really?

Trauman: Sure.

Courtney: Wow.

Trauman: But I only do it when I've had... too much to drink.

Courtney: That's when all good yodeling happens.

Trauman: I know! My grandma taught me how to yodel.

Harley: So, if I were to throw out two, then, I would go with Simple Minds' "Don't You (Forget About Me)" from The Breakfast Club, and, well, and a lot of those '80s songs I enjoy doing. But maybe for variety, "Just Dropped In" by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition.

Courtney: Great song.

Trauman: Oooh.

Harley: Made famous by The Big Lebowski. This is Louisville, after all.

Trauman: Can you do "Under The Milky Way With You"? Or "Under The Milky Way Tonight"?

Harley: Yeah! From The Church. I love that song!

Trauman: Oh, I love that song.

Harley: That's a great song.

Trauman: Oh!

Harley: But enough about karaoke, right? And I would really like to just sort of--I can quickly do it--but I'd like to tell the story of my first Computers & Writing experience because I think it was a, because it was a great experience. And I know it's not everybody's, but--

Trauman: I'll tell mine also.

Harley: Yeah. So actually I met you, Trauman, a couple of weeks before Computers & Writing, in 2011, in Ann Arbor. And so you literally took me to my first Computers & Writing. And you had been a few times and knew several people, so it was a phenomenal experience for me not to just show up in a vacuum, not to just show up unescorted, but to have, to kind of be under your wing the whole time. So the first person that you introduced me to at Computers & Writing was Cindy Selfe, and for a first-year master's student who was still trying to figure out how to find something in the digital world, that was an incredible opportunity for me.

Courtney: That's a pretty good place to start!

Harley: Not a bad place, right. And because of Cindy being Cindy-- Oh, the thing that you prepped, which was great, was, "You're not going to believe or trust that Cindy is that enthusiastic about you, but I promise you, she is."

Trauman: <chuckles>

Harley: And just like you predicted, she found me throughout the conference multiple times and asked, "So, what are you seeing? What are you learning? What are you thinking about? Have you found something you're interested in yet?" Because I was just one of those "I just want to check things out and see what I'm interested in studying further." And it was finally through a panel with Kyle Stedman, Will Burdette, and I forget the third panelist, but they were talking about sound. Also a panel with Bump Halbritter and Crystal Van Kooten. And that's when I discovered there were people doing sound stuff in our field. So I said to Cindy that, "Yeah, you know, I think I'm interested in sound." Then she said, "Well, here's my email address, and I'll hook you up with musicians in the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives," and of course she wrote that great article on aurality and breath. So that one introduction alone was hugely formative for me in my trajectory as a scholar, or a student--a student-scholar--but that was just one of many people you introduced me to, Cheryl Ball being one of the next ones. Doug Eyman right after that. You know, Quinn, and Tim Lockridge, and other people who now I connect with on a fairly regular basis. And I think that speaks to not only how many people you knew and could introduce me to, but also to the size of Computers & Writing, I think, is really significant. Because it's big enough

to feel like there's some movement and heft within our field, but I think it's at the same time small enough that you can't help to bump into Cindy Selfe a few times, or someone like Cheryl. And the type of people, it seems to me, who go to Computers & Writing, are ones that enjoy being bumped into, and being accosted, and being, you know, introduced. So, I don't know--I've been talking a lot, so I'll pass the baton.

Trauman: My first Computers & Writing-- Wait, your first Computers & Writing was Michigan, right?

Harley: Right.

Trauman: U of Michigan?

Harley: Mm-hmm.

Trauman: Ann Arbor? And mine was at UC Davis. And that was just after the first DMAC that I had helped with. And so I knew Cindy pretty well at that time. I knew Cheryl pretty well at that time, but I didn't really know anyone else. And so I showed up to Davis, and I was staying in a hotel room by myself about a mile off campus, and I walked there the first morning--it was a beautiful day--and I was kind of terrified. You know, I had heard all of the things that people say about how small and--people didn't use the word intimate, but that's a word that I've come to use since then, in that you really can say what's on your mind. You really don't have to bite your tongue too much. It's this weird balance between not being so small that everybody knows everybody's business--you know, you can still show up at the conference and have there be a lot of discovery about your colleagues and these people that you meet--but at the same time, there's a familiarity, too. There's a really nice mix. I've been going to the conference for quite a while now, and since we don't get out that much, we remember it, you know? And I think that is fantastic. But the other thing that I was overwhelmed with my first couple of conferences the first couple times I attended was this sense of not only formal but informal mentorship, where you really can walk up to anybody in the room. You can walk up to anybody at one of the large dinners. You can walk up to anybody while you're waiting for a presentation to begin or after they're done. And you can ask them anything you want. You could ask them advice. You can tell them you want to follow up later. And it really, really is this incredibly gracious and generous place, and I've not been to another conference that has that tone to it. I've been to conferences that are smaller... You know, I think it's a perfect balance. And it doesn't seem competitive. People seem like they're trying to help each other.

Courtney: I guess at some point, somebody needs to talk about exactly how big C&W is. I'm not sure that needs to happen in this conversation, but you're making a lot of comparisons about this to other conferences and they're size; we should be able to enumerate that somehow.

Trauman: I'm guessing there are about 300 hundred people? That would be my guess. If someone told me there were 200, I would say, "Yeah, I'm surprised it's that small," but I would believe it. It's a fraction of Cs or RSA or MLA or WPA. Well, no, not WPA--WPA is also a very small conference.

Harley: The other thing that I think is--you know, I don't know if this is accounting for the size or for the mix of people there--but there's a difference in, I think, the levels of creativity or the variety in the panels that I see. The first time I presented at Computers & Writing was 2012, at North Carolina State University, and that was a... I don't even know what... it was a performance as much as it was a panel. I mean, I was playing my guitar along with a video on the screen, and Steven Hammer was doing his noise/glitch stuff, and Kyle Stedman was scratching records, and Jon Stone is singing train songs from the 1920s and '10s. And I just don't think those kinds of panels fly in other conferences as well. I wouldn't want to try that at a Cs. It just would feel out of place. To go see Dan Anderson do anything he's done at C&W in the last few years has been completely paradigm-changing for me in terms of what is possible in an academic presentation. So I think that kind of playfulness is really welcomed. And switching up formats and trying new things that don't resemble traditional scholarship seems to be really celebrated and invited at Computers & Writing, not just simply allowed or permitted.

Trauman: I would agree with that as well.

Courtney: I did have a few other questions, mostly because--and maybe I'm starting to think this way because C&W falls during the summer. I really have been thinking about this as summer camp... for dorks. Myself included--I'm not calling everybody else dorks; I'm calling all of us dorks.

Harley: We own it.

Trauman: <chuckles> I embrace that, so...

Courtney: Let me be clear about that.

Trauman: Yes. Dork it up.

Courtney: So, as one might have with summer camp, are there any special songs that you might sing with your bunkmates, or any special jargon that is used mostly around C&W, or is there some fantastic lore associated with the greatest C&W ever 20 years ago, blah blah blah? What does a newbie need to know to fit in?

Trauman: Alright, I'll contribute a couple things. The first thing is when you're planning on going to the conference, especially if it's your first time, you want to decide--and you might ask around around if you can, maybe even make a Twitter query or something--but you're going to have the option of staying in the dorms or staying in a hotel off campus. The dorms are very much like staying in a dorm. However, that's one way of making inroads with other people. You know, people are wandering around, they're congregating in the social spaces in the dorms, they're walking to and from different events. That's a great way to meet people. But you know, they're not as comfortable or, I suppose, adult as a hotel room, and you may or may not get to choose your roommate. So that would be one thing that I think you'd want to do. And no, you don't need to know any special songs. People generally don't listen to see if other people are referencing the right names and doing that kind of thing. However, I will say that my best conferences have been when I've stayed in the dorms, and also when I've stayed up way later than I should have, drinking more than I should have, saying things that I probably shouldn't have. And that's something that I think is incredibly

valuable to see each other doing. Not necessarily the drinking and saying... well, not necessarily the drinking.

<laughter>

Trauman: But definitely to see each say things that we wouldn't say in other environments, you know, to get to that level of comfort with someone else, especially even if you're in a small group that other conferences, I just haven't felt that happening. And then the last thing I'll say at C&W is that when I go to places like 4Cs or RSA, even MLA some, what ends up happening a lot is that people will walk around in packs, given the programs that they are from, or that they graduated from, or maybe the schools where they're teaching. And at Computers & Writing, that really, really doesn't happen. The friendships that form, I guess the cliques that form, if you will, they don't seem inaccessible, and they don't seem to be based on geography or based around a particular common program. And that I think, to me, makes them feel pretty accessible.

Harley: And the other that is really special, I think, about Computers & Writing is the funding for graduate students for the GRN that's funded through the Ride 2 C&W that, I think wasn't it Bill Hart-Davidson that started that?

Trauman: I think--I'm not sure if it was just him, but I know that Suzanne Malley and Alanna Frost were also very early on in the process of getting that organized.

Harley: Right. So it's a bike-a-thon, and the money raised for riding to C&W goes to help fund graduate students to get to C&W, and this is something that these senior scholars took upon themselves to make the conference more available to younger scholars. And I just think that's indicative of the attitude that I've found present. I've never felt awkward at Computers & Writing sitting down at a table with more senior scholars and just simply picking their brain, asking them questions, and they've all been very, very generous. And it always... Computers & Writing and the Watson Conference, as well, always make me feel very good about being in this field and just about the humanity of it, so...

Trauman: You know, that also reminds me, the meals. The meals are generally held in a big, giant room where everybody sits down together and, just like at the Graduate Research Network, you're sitting there with eight other, or seven other people, and you're kind of forced to either listen and get to know them, or answer their curious questions about you, for a meal. And that happens four or five times throughout the conference, depending on how long you're there. So really, there are all these ways that the conference is designed to get you interacting with strangers.

Harley: Mm-hmm. That's something that, you know... C&W costs more than to go to than Cs, and I think one of the reasons is that they feed you so many times. And that's something that I seriously miss. When I go to Cs, I'm typically eating with people I know, and I'm making plans to go out with folks from my program or that I haven't seen in awhile, or to glom onto someone else's sort of pseudo-meeting to share a meal. But it's very small and kind of isolated. Having everybody in that big room, and even if you're sitting at a table with eight, you're still getting up and refilling your drink or whatever, and interacting with 50 or 60 other people, easily, every single meal. So I do think that does seem by design, and it certainly helps facilitate being more comfortable.

Courtney: How about you guys both tell us what is the best part of C&W. This is a conference you attend regularly... what is it about it that you like the best?

Trauman: What I like best about Computers & Writing is it's sort of what I think heaven would be like, I guess. <laughs> I mean that's obviously overstating it--

Harley: <laughing> No, I think that's about right, Trauman.

Trauman: Yeah, pretty much! No, it's a place you go, and it's a place I arrive, and everything is relevant. It's really, really nice. I could go to almost any session at any given time and know that I'm going to get something that is not only useful but something that I'm actually interested in as well. And that I can't say about any other conference I've been to.

Harley: Maybe similar to the heaven thing... The people are my favorite part of Computers & Writing, and one example of how that manifests is that I have never, ever felt judged at Computers & Writing. You know, I have never said anything that I thought, "Gah, that was dumb," based on the way that they responded to me. I've never had anyone talk down to me. I've had lots of people ask me wonderful, probing follow-up questions if I've said something that was maybe not thought through, but I have never felt any kind of elitism or judgment from this particular crowd. And that really makes me want to go back, and it makes me want to contribute, and it makes me want to pay that forward, and all that kind of thing. So I think it's a conference where you can sort of let your guard down a little bit and be yourself.

Courtney: Alright, now I have a follow-up question, which is, what behavior, action, or quality you would encourage attendees to perpetuate, if that's different from what you've said earlier?

Harley: Um, yeah, I think that keeping a spirit of inquisitiveness, curiosity, and playfulness is really valuable. And I think it's celebrated there, so I think you can go a long way asking off-the-wall questions and saying things, starting sentences with "Wouldn't it be cool if...?" Because I think a lot of neat things have come out of Computers & Writing--a lot of wonderful collaborations, just in my own life already--have come out of "There should a tool that X" or "There should be a place where we can Y." So I think... I was thinking a little bit earlier if we were to characterize all the different conferences in the field, I feel kind of like, my personal opinion is that Watson is a little bit the heart of the field, and that Cs maybe is more the hands, and C&W is sort of the curiosity or the imagination. Because I think that is where people are pushing into asking questions about how can we fix what we don't like, and how can we build what we need to do what we imagine we might be able to. And the people here are oftentimes the people who have the chops to be able to build things like that, and so, but it's only through the collaboration that comes through speaking your mind into these "what if" scenarios that can make some of these things be realized.

Courtney: Nice answer.

Trauman: Yeah. I get questions all the time about how to network, and my answer is always the same. I try to challenge or encourage people to think about someone else as the center of their networking activities. Instead of going out, trying to look for people to collaborate

with you, I think it's a much more useful place, especially for beginning scholars and participants to find projects or investments that already exist that they can contribute to and establish their chops. Establish that everything they do doesn't necessarily have to be about them. And that's a great way to get your foundation in the field, by helping other people, and then having them think of you next time something important needs to happen. So I would like to see more of that. That's my favorite way of people getting involved in projects.

<segue music>

Courtney: Well, I'm looking forward to spending some time at this conference with two people who know what they're doing.

Harley: Well, I don't know if we know what we're doing, but we've been there before, and it's a safe place. So we'll take it from there.

Courtney: That's a good start.

Harley: That's right. So, and we are going to be there together, right? KairosCast is going to be representing.

Courtney: We are! We are going to participate in a pre-conference workshop, teaching about how to produce podcasts on a shoestring. And we'll also be shoving microphones in front of people's faces pretty much the entire event.

Harley: That's right. If we do this right, we can get a year's worth of material, all gathered in one long, good weekend. As we've said before and we'll say it again, we don't want it to be just our voices on here, right?

Courtney: Definitely--we're hoping that we can encourage a lot of fellow attendees to participate and to use whatever gear they have to make some low stakes recordings that they can give us to put out on KairosCast during the next year.

Harley: Yeah, and the thing about Computers & Writing is that you're walking past people who you've been reading and respecting in the field--these are people whose work you're building your own on, and perhaps for those of you who are a bit more seasoned, these are the people coming up who are building on your work. So these are good conversations to be having, and you're going to have them anyway, so bring a digital recorder or download an app to your phone. Give it a test before you get there, and then just walk up to folks and ask them questions.

Courtney: And if you find that you can't get things to work out, feel free to tap me or Harley on the shoulder, and we will try to help you troubleshoot your gear.

Harley: That's right. And you know, a good place to do that is in our pre-conference workshop, because we're going to be doing some hands-on stuff there aren't we?

Courtney: We are. We're going to be working on the conference theme and splitting up into teams to investigate the different modes of audio production and play.

Harley: I think it's going to be pretty glorious. And as I understand it, there's still room. So come and play with us and create some content.

Courtney: Alright, Harley, I think that's about it for today. I need to get my paper written for C&W.

Harley: Yeah, I guess we still have a little planning to do, don't we?

Courtney: Special thanks to Brian Croxall and Ryan Trauman for their help with this episode.

Harley: And also thanks to Kris Blair, Michael Day, and Cindy Selfe for contributing to our Chatter segment.

Courtney: Check the KairosCast page for links from this episode.

Harley: You'll also find Twitter addresses for us and the guests who were on today's show.

Courtney: Yeah, make sure you're following them. They've got good stuff to say.

Harley: Indeed. And we hope that we see you at Computers & Writing in a couple of days.

Courtney: See you in Wisconsin!

<outro music>

Courtney: KairosCast is produced by Courtney Danforth and Harley Ferris.

Harley: It is distributed by *Kairos*, Doug Eyman, senior editor.

Courtney: Our editor is Cheryl Ball.

Harley: If we had interns, their names would go here.

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