

2018 Professional Development Grant Report  
Southern States Communication Conference

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## **B. Restatement of Creative Work/Professional Activity Enhancement**

In April of 2018 I presented a top-paper at the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Southern States Communication Association (SSCA) conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The website for SSCA is <http://www.ssca.net>

## **C. Brief Review of Creative Work/Professional Activity Enhancement**

The Southern States Communication Association 88<sup>th</sup> conference theme was “Muses and Musings in the Music City.” Conference guidelines emphasized addressing the theme as well as presenting research that cut across disciplines. My original rhetorical critique entitled, “*Kenneth Burke and Malcom Cowley: Charting the a-musing implications of friendship through letters*” met both requirements, and was honored as one of the top three faculty papers within the Kenneth Burke Interest Group.

Specifically, the critique explores the often contentious seventy-year friendship between Kenneth Burke and Malcom Cowley, as reflected in letters the two men exchange between 1915-1918.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the implications of Burke’s identification/division paradox is illuminated and extended using Thomas Moore’s concept of soul and the attachment/detachment paradox. Through Burke and Cowley’s friendship, as recorded in those letters, we can see the tension of identification and how letters functioned to keep that tension present and honored.

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<sup>1</sup> Jay, Paul, editor. *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcom Cowley*. New York, Viking Penguin, 1988.

#### **D. Summary of Outcomes/Experiences**

I set out to achieve three goals during this conference. First, to present my paper to garner insights and suggestions toward moving the essay to possible publication. I was very pleased with the interest, enthusiasm, and critique of the paper. In particular, Dr. Clark Roundtree of the University of Alabama at Huntsville, who served as the paper respondent, told me: “I love this paper. It simply has to be published.” Moreover, he found my pairing Burke and Moore to be insightful and well written. He did note points that needed clarification, but his critique reinforced my belief in the overall argument posed in the paper. As I write this final report I am also preparing to submit the revised paper to the *Kenneth Burke Journal*, for review and (hopefully) publication.

My second goal was to secure a leadership position with the Burke Group. As a newcomer to the Southern States family, I was not sure I would gain a position. However, I was elected co-program planner for the 90<sup>th</sup> annual convention in 2020, in Frisco, Texas.

My third goal was to meet with Dr. Mary Beth Asbury, who is the new book editor for the *Southern Communication Journal*, to offer my services as a reviewer. Although currently there are no books in my interest or expertise areas, Dr. Ashbury assured me that she would keep me in mind.

#### **E. Conclusions/Recommendations**

Beyond presenting my paper and engaging with other scholars within the SSCA community, I am also focused on how my approach to Kenneth Burke will enhance the knowledge of Burke for students in Human Communication Theory, which is the capstone course for the our major. As Marie Hochmuth observed in an essay in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, “Burke is difficult and

often confusing,” (144). This makes teaching Burke to students, who often do not want to ready theory, challenging.

Upon my return to campus, Burke loomed on the syllabus. I used the idea of creating and maintaining friendships through letters as a jumping off point to creating and maintaining friendships through social media. Then I introduced Burke’s paradox of identification and wove the paradox of friendship into Burke’s theory. Students generally liked this approach. They found Burke’s theories to be more “human related,” as one student told me. Moreover, their writing reflected a much stronger understanding of the identification paradox than those of the previous class. Going forward, as I tweak my approach for the spring 2019 class, I plan on incorporating more of the Burke-Cowley letters into the class, and use them as a base to expand on Burke’s analytic method of Dramatism.

Finally, I want to extend my thanks to the ATU for providing the funding to present my research, connect with colleagues, and enhance my growth as an educator.

Copies to:

Professor Anthony Caton, Chair, Department of Communication & Journalism

Dr. Jeff Woods, Dean, College of Arts & Humanities

Dr. Phillip Bridgmon, Interim Vice-President, Academic Affairs

**F. Appendix:** Copies of my paper are available upon request.