

Aca-Media Ep67: Reflections On The SCMS Conference (Past And Future)

Christine Becker 00:11

Welcome to the Aca-Media media podcast presented by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies.

Michael Kackman 00:18

I'm Michael Kackman at the University of Notre Dame,

Christine Becker 00:21

and I am Chris Becker in the same place, as we, again have had a long while since we've talked at you, but we are actively making moves to boost our output. Thanks to some new helpers.

Michael Kackman 00:34

We've got, yeah, we have some new folks who've who've joined in, and we will introduce them formally soon. In the meantime, we're doing a quick revisit of an earlier conversation that we had with some of the leaders of ft. SCMS. Yeah. And

Christine Becker 00:52

so this took place at the SCMS conference in Denver. And some of you might have might have seen already, or we, you know, we did an episode on Zoom, or it was on YouTube, a YouTube Live episode. So if you've seen that this is a piece of that. So this is an interview that we had with the SCMS President Priscilla Ovalle, and she's the outgoing president, but is now past president. So she is still going to be, you know, have an active voice in the board. But she had a really great conversation with us at the conference about you know, what, what she was hoping for, from the conference, and you know, the future of in person conferencing and a bunch of really important questions like that. And I think it was a really fascinating conversation.

Michael Kackman 01:40

And it features our very own Chris Becker.

Christine Becker 01:43

It does, and Michael too just a little bit on location, on location live in Denver. Well live then recorded, edited and so forth, but you know, it'll feel like live, it'll feel like you're back in Denver in a stupid conference room.

Michael Kackman 02:01

making it sound good. Here we go.

Christine Becker 02:06

So we are finishing up our first in person SCMS, in four years here in Denver. So we're gonna ask right at the top here, what were you thinking about and hoping for coming into the conference? And how's the experience gone? Over the last few days?

Priscilla Ovalle 02:20

Yeah, you know, I, I'm so happy, I'm happy to see everybody hear to be in rooms with people to see, you know, all the just to be in the liveness is the live in person, this is just really incredible. And I feel like the energy is there, right? There's a different energy, I feel people are excited to be meeting, new folks are seeing old friends. And so that's been really exciting to observe. And I just wanted to give a huge shout out to first off Vicky and the programming committee who did a fantastic job of like just putting all these panels together. And also the, the organization and the structure. I think that, you know, our first time back, you know, we had a lot of time to reflect on things that had worked in previous years and things that could be improved upon. And I think that, with that time, we put together a really great program with events in the middle of the day to kind of break it up making sure people had time for lunch. So I think there were just we were able to employ some really exciting, you know, useful things into the program that I think made it possible to reconnect or to make new connections with people. So that was really awesome. And, of course, the staff, right, like, they're constantly behind the scenes, doing all the things. And it's just, it's been great to see all of their fruits, you know, all of their labor come to fruition. And, of course, the board has been sort of guiding that all the way through. And you know, then people are here, people have submitted their work, brought it to here, brought it to Denver, and it just made all this possible. So I think for me, it's been really exciting. And I hope that that is true for people that are here experiencing it, especially people experiencing for the first time in person. So if I can, you know, if, if our if our new folks are having, you know, a good experience, if our queer and trans folks are having a good experience, if our marginalized folks are having a good experience, if our longtime veterans are having a good experience, like that's for me, that that's what I want. I want us all the intergenerational connections to be made and people to be here together. So I'm hopeful. I feel like that's happening. But I really hope that that that is, that's my hope. And I get a sense that that is really happening.

Christine Becker 04:27

To that point about the marginalized, I think it's important to acknowledge that some people can't be here, whether because of precarity, health, geography or environmental concerns. And as a current board member, I can attest that this comes up in our conversations a lot. And I think that's important for people to recognize. And this also might be a good example for our listeners about how the board work. So when we have our next board meeting in June, future conferences will be on the agenda. And of course, we have a few, the next few that are scheduled contractually with hotels we're locked into those that will we will begin what will end up being a year's long conversation about 2027 here in June, so that we can talk about that process like how that conversation works. And June will also be your final meeting as president at the helm. So what will things look like when we have an item on our agenda with something like thinking about the 2027 Conference?

Priscilla Ovalle 05:20

Yeah. So I mean, I tried to try to have a positive spin on all the the crappiness that we've had to endure over the past couple years. And you know, the challenge, of course, was how do we meet our financial

and contractual obligations? And then build on that. And so what I'm excited about is that we have the three year set, right? We know we're in Boston, we know we're in Chicago, Chicago, and then we don't know after that, right, so we have time to start thinking, to start planning to start researching all of the things that are going to need to happen if we want to be able to pursue a hybrid or virtual option, which is something that the members have been asking for something the board has been taking very seriously. But in even with all of the technological changes that have happened recently, it's still not a clear cut process, right? Like, there's still no model. And just thinking back to the pre conference, right? I'm really excited about the fact that we now have virtual pre conference and in person conference, right, this is our first year of actually doing that. And I think it's a model that could really be beneficial, ultimately, in terms of helping people find their place in SCMS. But even that the platform that we had relied on for three years now to do that work has gone away, right, they've closed, they've shuttered their their operations. So I think it's just a good example of how we were looking down the road, we have the opportunity, we have time on our side here to be able to, like, think about and plan and figure things out. But things change so rapidly, that even with that time, it's it's still a little bit unclear how we can proceed. So I'm looking forward to taking that opportunity to figure out how that's going to look, and working with board members and committees and volunteers to to hopefully, get a get a plan started, and then hope that there'll be enough long standing, you know, platforms and organizations that can help us do that work in a reasonable way. Yeah,

Christine Becker 07:05

You know, basically, what you've described, there is what we do as a board, we all sit there together. And there's what I think like 11 voting members, and then a handful of other non voting members, and then home office staff. And in a little over a year that I've been on the board, for me, the most beneficial thing is learning from everyone else in the room. So I'm at a particular type of institution, but we have everyone from, you know, people that are ones to small liberal arts colleges, we now have an HBCU member, we have an incoming Community College member. And so there's things that I would have never had to think about at Notre Dame, those come up in the room, or we have people with, you know, different identity categories, and so forth. So this is a reminder, every time of wide diversity and inclusion are important. And you know, questions come up, someone says, how about this, and another person says, Wait a minute, you have to factor in that. And that's, you know, what we're supposed to do, right? We're kind of a micro version of SCMS, trying to represent everyone. And it's not easy. There's so many facets, so many factions within the membership to represent. But I find it really gratifying to have those conversations, especially how much we take that very seriously take it to heart, about that we're trying to represent everyone, but recognizing there's so many constituencies that we're trying to represent.

Priscilla Ovalle 08:15

Absolutely. And I think one of the things that's been so incredibly beneficial, and something that I've seen in my time on the board, is the now consistent placement of a precarious labor organization member on the board, right. So just very just that's built in now that's baked in. And so now we have somebody who's always going to be really helping us think very clearly and carefully about what it means to you know, to not have maybe the institutional resources and support, or even that institutional connection to be able to, to support, you know, the travel and the, you know, the time that is required for you know, coming together as a community in places like this. But I think you're exactly right. Like I

have learned so much as a board member, I have just learned, it's just been real, a real joy, even at its most challenging moments, it's been such a joy to be thinking together and working together. And really working for a common goal, which is like how do we make this the best place for our members and all of their needs, right? We can't do all the things we're not you know, we are at the end of the day, a scholarly organization. And there are constraints that we have, we don't have, you know, an endowment or anything like that we don't have like, we have resources, but we don't have all the resources. And so just being able to hear members needs and trying to put that into like some kind of strategic plan that we can build towards. That's been just really exciting to see. And I wanted to just want to one sort of say like point to the cyclical nature of being on the board like time I don't know about y'all, but time has been like really it's timey wimey for sure. Right. Like it's just like I have no sense of what yesterday versus two years ago was but but you know, there's a rhythm to the academic year there's a rhythm to and similarly there's a rhythm to the board, right. So, you were talking about the June board meeting that it'll be my last one presiding as president, and we'll start to see the new leadership come in. But the thing to know is that like, we're already going to be working on the next conference, right? Like June is you don't forget, you know, like in May, August is when all the proposals come forward for seminar for seminars and papers, then there's a pretty quick turnaround time of review by the programming committee, and then, you know, everybody gets notified. So, so much happens in such a short period of time, so far away from the actual conference, that I think it's just a good reminder that, you know, I came in really wanting to do all the things and like, fix all the things and then realizing, Oh, wait, there's, there's so much just day to day stuff that has to happen. And institutional changes, we know is really slow and challenging. And, you know, even with, even with people that are motivated to make strategic interventions, it's long and hard, right? So just being able to just recognize, okay, this is a long term project, this is not this is something that we're all coming together, and we're doing as much as we can, in you know, at the same time, as we're making sure people have timely notifications to you know, of whether or not they'll be able to present their work, and to, you know, to do all of that volunteer labor behind the scenes to make it happen. So, I think for me, it's just a sense of time and a sense of community that is all in support of our larger membership community.

Christine Becker 11:23

Yeah, let me jump in for Michael, he's got a question on our Zoom.

Michael Kackman 11:28

I mentioned there's a kind of a structural tension between keeping things central Midwestern in the US, because it, you know, allows you to put the conference at an affordable hub for airline travel for people in North America. But of course, what that means is that it's more expensive for people internationally. And that's a constant struggle to sort out. And so I'm just wondering, are you thinking about revisiting the idea of doing a European or another try at an Asian conference? Or is that still a ways down the road? It right

Priscilla Ovalle 12:01

now, it's always down the road only, not not, not from lack of desire. But I think just practically speaking, the thing that we're hearing right now, obviously, are numbers that are that are based outside of the of North America, have been asking for, you know, us to to think more globally about location. But I think

right now, the thing that we're hearing the most is, you know, options for some kind of remote connection. Right. So I think that that right now is where the priority is, especially because we have these next three years already lined up and committed. So for us, I think it's really how can we be a hybrid model going to be within our reach, given the fact that we're a midsize organization, right, were too big for smaller locations were too small for bigger locations. And so we are in this kind of awkward position, just as the size of an organization to travel as broadly as we might like. So right now, what what options exist for our member to serve our members, either in terms of hybrid or remote options that that would then allow for all of us to connect, wherever we may be located. So I think I think that's really where the board's putting its future thinking energy at the moment. And again, just the limitations of travel any anyhow. And the size of the organization, it's always going to be an issue for us, whatever city we would find ourselves in. So I think right now really thinking to the hybrid to the virtual research and exploration, that's that's where the energy is, I think, going to be placed after we complete our obligations through Chicago.

Christine Becker 13:36

And as you mentioned, you're nearing the end of your term as president, and after the June meeting, you'll shift to pass president and the way it works. If our listeners don't know, you're president elect for two years president for two years, and then pass president for two years. And so you stick around as past president, so we benefit from your expertise being passed down. And we've had the benefit of the expertise of Paula Massood for the past few years. And then we'll have Vicki Johnson moving into your seat. So I wanted to finish them with reflections you have on goals you came in with, like when you decided, yes, I'm going to run for SCMS president. What kind of goals and intentions and hopes did you have? And then looking back now, how do you think things played out in actuality?

Priscilla Ovalle 14:17

Well, you know, I didn't plan for a pandemic. So there's that right. But you know, I think one of the things that I learned is that, you know, I, I came in with the idea that I had some some got some kind of tangible goals, like fair use something that's really important to me and something I think that we, you know, as a organization, we really want to sort of make sure lives on in some capacity. So that way it can, you know, that we can do the work that we do. And even though that's very us specific, it does have repercussions globally. So I think that there's a way that you know, that, for me was something that I really wanted to focus on. But at the end of the day, what I ended up realizing, and of course, because I think it was in my first year as incoming president that that everything shut down. So it really changed our plans. And what I realized was oh, Okay, there's actually we're, we're trying to do all these things. And we have all you know that what, what I realized, and this was me putting on my producer hat, my community builder hat, right. Like that's that was really what motivated me to be to run for this position is because I just wanted to help people do the things that they do, right. We're all we've got such great ideas, we've got such excellent community of scholars and artists and activists here that I really wanted to make sure that people that we could just keep doing the things that we're doing, and they're doing, and we're all doing. And the pandemic, really, you know, it's terrible, obviously, but what it did help highlight is just how valuable time and our labor and our energy is like physical energy and like mental and emotional energy. And so what I ended up realizing that the thing that I'm hoping that I will have done with my time here is to help support the infrastructure that helps people do the work that they're doing. Right. So one of the things that I've been trying to focus on one of the things that, you

know, we've been able to do, and we'll be talking about this June is a new support structure for committees, so that they can do the work that they need to do based on, you know, goals that the board has set up. So I guess my hope is what I think I will end up having put into place and help, you know, continue on is some kind of an internal institutional support. So that way, the work that starts in one year, can live on and continue and build and accumulate over the years by just something as simple as having an archive for what the committee has done, you know, what committees have done in previous years, so that every time we have new people coming in, on to the, to those roles, they have something to build from, and they can continue that work and continue on in new ways. So those were the things that I you know, that's that's, that was my pivot, right from like, a very specific thing to a more infrastructural like, How can I help people do their work more humanely. So that's, and that those are things that I think the board is always wanting to do, but that was my, you know, coming up from outside in, you know, having never served on the board before. And then coming into this role, that was something that I thought I could I could contribute. And, you know, the pandemic just made it more immediate, an immediate need for us to just be mindful of what people are doing all that labor that people are putting into the organization. But the thing I learned the most is how passionate everybody is right? Like, even, you know, one of the challenges that we face as, as any, in any kind of leadership position is just like, when people like complaints that people have, right, like things that people you know, like, somebody sees an issue, and they're gonna let us know. And, you know, sometimes it's hard to get that feedback, right? Because you want to hear like you're doing a good job. But then that's sometimes you hear that, but most offense like, well, you could have done that a little better. And so I think one of the things that I have just sort of, like, recognized as I hear those things, it's like, these are people that are really invested. These are people that are really passionate, they're committed to what we do and how we do it, and they want to see it thrive, and they want to see it grow and be, you know, be something even more exciting. So I think what I, what I've learned is just that we all want to be here, we all want to be together, we want to do our work, we want to be, you know, good citizens of this community. And so, yeah, I just, I'm looking forward to being able to continue to Play that role in the back seat, you know, as a non voting member. That's another thing about being a past president, I no longer have a vote, right. But I can, you know, offer the, you know, that kind of institutional knowledge and that kind of history that will hopefully help Vicky as she comes into the presidency, Vicky Johnson as she comes into the presidency, and Yeidy Rivero as she comes in, following Vicky. So, you know, I'm looking forward to just sort of playing a supporting background role. And this next phase after, after this last June board meeting.

Christine Becker 18:38

As Secretary want to say, I love you as president, because you keep meetings moving. And at the end of each section, you say, you know, let's summarize what we just talked about. And as I'm taking notes, I'm like, Thank God, I can write down everything I miss now. So you're very good at all the, you know, Robert's Rules of Order of it all. And

Priscilla Ovalle 18:54

so thank you, I appreciate it. And you know, it's a heavy lift the Secretary, because you have to make sure that, you know, that's that's what that's our roadmap. Right? So the Secretary role for those of you that are interested in board positions and lead leadership positions, that's such an important role, because it's where we the action items get documented. It's where we basically kind of continue on and

it makes tiny why meanness tangible. And so yeah, thank you for all of your work. And I wanted to just say one last thing is that, you know, on the website, you know, sometimes in like any website with a lot of information, it can be hard to navigate. But there are ways for people to find information about like nomination processes, and the nominating process include, you know, there's a forum for it, the nominate, there's a nominating committee that basically wrangles all of that stuff and then puts forward names to for the board to consider for various roles. But there is a form that we all have access to as members where we can nominate a person for, you know, these these leadership positions, board positions, and then that includes self nomination. So those those are all things that you know, it's something that just wanted to share for people that are interested in getting more involved.

Christine Becker 19:58

I think I didn't even know that so that's good to know. I've learned something

Priscilla Ovalle 20:00

I just double checked it to make sure I wasn't like mucking it up. Yeah, there that is that is a part of the form. So yeah, it's, it's there. So

Christine Becker 20:07

fantastic. Thank you so much President

Priscilla Ovalle 20:09

My pleasure

Christine Becker 20:21

All right. So fantastic conversation there. That was great fun. And really, you know, I think to me, it energizes me when I hear a member of the board talk about what we do it really I find it such a gratifying experience being on the board.

Michael Kackman 20:36

I think most academics, or at least most of the ones that I know, and like, have a sort of reflexive skepticism about any kind of mechanisms of authority. And so the board sounds like this kind of terrifying thing. But of course, the board like this organization is us. And so it's really good to have a reminder that these are not like, scary remote people. There are Yeah, they are people who are just at the other end of an email or a telephone line and are available to communicate with about stuff that's going on in the field.

Christine Becker 21:13

Yeah, it's more like a c- op, I would think of it as more like a co-op than a, you know, like your neighborhood association board, which is very top down, it's it's very much, I wouldn't say it's bottom up, right, there's still the notion of the board, you know, originates a lot of ideas, but it we originate ideas because of what we hear from the membership. And so, you know, I think two things are important there. Number one, communicate then with the board, if you have thoughts, if you have, you know, things you want to share, you know, and reaching out not just to the board, but your, you know, the cigs that you're in, or the caucuses that you're in, that's how the communication happens through

those pipelines. And then the second thing is volunteer yourself, become part of the board, there's certainly all kinds of ways that you can volunteer. And I will note the numbers we've had of people volunteering, and I've only been there two years. So but but everyone who has been there for a longer time, like the home office members are saying, the numbers of people volunteering have really grown a lot. So there's a lot of and that's for volunteering for, you know, to be on awards committee, or to be part of a proposal vetting committee for the conference that a lot of people are really stepping up and volunteering, and that's fantastic. But you can also nominate yourself for the board. And I think a lot of people don't realize that you could, you know, someone can nominate you or you can self nominate to be on the board. And the board is really hoping that we can communicate that and particularly a way for perhaps, you know, under underrepresented people, international scholars to to, you know, make it known that they would be interested in the board. So there is a self nomination process, there's a form on the SCMS website, if you're looking for that, you go to cm studies.org on the top bar, click on About Us, and then click on governance and there's a form there to nominate.

Michael Kackman 23:07

It's a good opportunity to join in, and you can essentially decide how much involvement you want, you know, you can sign up for an awards committee or something and have a very compact commitment that allows you to contribute to the organization and also get to know some interesting new work. Or you can go ahead and and get involved in a longer term kind of way, like by joining the board directly.

Christine Becker 23:35

Yep, a lot of options, all of which are volunteer, right, you're not gonna get paid. But it's it's service, which counts for some of us. But also it, you know, helps you guide what our primary organization is doing. So it's, that's good too. Yeah,

Michael Kackman 23:54

it is. Alright, Aca-Media would not happen without the support of SCMs and of the University of Notre Dame. We are also grateful to our motley crew of co-conspirators.

Christine Becker 24:08

So thank you to Frank Mondelli, who is at UC Davis,

Michael Kackman 24:11

Stephanie Brown at Washington College and

Christine Becker 24:15

the golden ears of Todd Thompson down there at University of Texas at Austin. Thank you. Is it at Austin or is it a hyphen?

Michael Kackman 24:21

University of Texas? Oh, God, I don't even remember anymore.

Christine Becker 24:25

God damn prepositions.

Michael Kackman 24:27

Oh, prepositions. Can this be the end of us all?

Christine Becker 24:30

I'm gonna drown in them. Yep, suffocate in prepositions.

Michael Kackman 24:34

All right. Thanks for listening, and we will see you again. Anon.

Christine Becker 24:38

Bye