



## **A message to the ICA community from the Executive Director**

Wednesday, 18 March 2020

We know that many of you are under extreme stress as you try to accomplish your research and teaching responsibilities in the middle of university shutdowns and extreme anxiety worldwide, while at the same time seeing to the health of your own families. I'm sending this email to catch everyone up on where we are in terms of ICA business and provide one place for you to find everything you will need when you are ready to turn your attention to ICA matters.

### **The conference**

As you know, the ICA conference in May in Australia was [converted to a virtual conference](#) over a week ago (6 March), at the very beginning of what turned out to be a domino effect of conferences canceling worldwide. We're putting the virtual conference platform together with our provider as we speak, and we think you're going to be excited about the possibilities, which include a virtual exhibit hall, session-specific Q&A, an "information booth," a poster exhibition, and even some fun, virtual social gatherings. The conference platform will be open for about a week, encompassing the original days of the conference, and the Q&As for sessions will be open that entire time so that attendees in various time zones can speak with each other in a "chat room" environment, providing an even more robust Q&A experience than occurs in the in-person conference. Most presentations will be pre-recorded, and we will have tutorials for creating and uploading those soon. We will update the [FAQ](#) once we have more detailed information. If you weren't attending the Australia conference but would like to register now that it is a virtual event, you can [register here](#). Registration fees are discounted by 25%.

### **The Hardship Fund**

Claes de Vreese (U of Amsterdam), ICA President-Elect and #ica20 Planner), has initiated an ICA20 Hardship Fund, collecting donations from universities, individuals, and ICA divisions & interest groups for a fund to which student and early-career scholars will be able to apply for reimbursement of nonrefundable flight and visa expenses. As we won't know until May whether individuals will receive refunds from canceled flights--this information evolves daily as restrictions are put in place--the application to receive reimbursement will not be open until the virtual conference starts in late May. If you are interested in donating as an individual to the hardship fund, please [click here](#) to do so. If you are interested in donating as an institution in response to Claes' call, please contact [me](#) and I can get you the information you need. ICA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and all donations to the fund are tax-deductible in the US to the extent allowable by law.

### **The global headquarters office**

To accomplish ICA's [mission](#) in the current environment, we are taking every precaution possible to protect the health and safety of our team and their families, given the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic.

As of last Monday, the ICA headquarters office in Washington, DC, USA is closed and all staff are working remotely until further notice. ICA's existing technological capabilities enable everyone on our team to work seamlessly from remote locations - we have two full-time remote staff (in Los Angeles and Rhode Island) who are in constant contact with our Washington, DC office via Slack messaging and video. During this time, we are all using these existing systems to stay in touch, just as we have always done during regular work days and when we are traveling for ICA business.



# International Communication Association

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We have also instituted a "safe space" policy regarding our work Slack messaging system, meaning that group channels on our staff Slack are mutually agreed to be free of discussion of COVID-19 news updates and rumours, so as to keep anxiety levels low and allow those who are avoiding social media to avoid pandemic-related talk altogether as needed for their mental health. Sometimes, it's helpful to just be able to concentrate on your work! All business travel plans, including ICA booths at other organization's conferences, for ICA staff have been canceled.

## Our availability

During this period, we will be available to our members as always: your emails and voicemails will be answered as per usual (our desk phones redirect to our cell phones during office hours, and we receive your voicemails via our email), and we are working diligently to prepare our virtual #ica20 conference for May.

Before calling or emailing, please also ensure that your question has not already been answered in our [Conference FAQ](#), which covers everything from hotel and flight refunds, to registration fees, to how the virtual conference will work. If you do email us, please be patient in waiting for an answer as our work volume is high right now.

**Please note that we may not answer our phones immediately** as we are frequently in (virtual) meetings with each other accomplishing our work. We will return your message as soon as possible; but please note that **email is a more efficient way for us to help you at this time**. If you do call, *please also state your email address*, as we may need to send you information/links/attachments to answer your request.

## Staying in touch

Please also be sure to follow us on social media if you're on those platforms. Our Twitter handle is [@icahdq](#) and on Facebook we are [International Communication Association \(ICA official page\)](#). (Please note there is also an unofficial ICA page; be sure you're in the right place. The official page has the new logo with a black background as the profile thumbnail).

On behalf of the ICA staff, thank you for your understanding and support during what is a challenging time for all of us. We have been gratified by the support for the hardship fund and for the kind messages to our staff on social media and email; the ICA community is truly a wonderful network. We wish you, your families, and your colleagues good health.

Sincerely,

Laura Sawyer  
ICA Executive Director