Informal Logic @ 25

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the First International Symposium on Informal Logic
University of Windsor, June 1978
May 14 - 17, 2003

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Twenty-five years ago, in June 1978, the First International Symposium on Informal Logic was held at the University of Windsor. This symposium brought together for the first time a group of teachers and scholars who had been struggling to bring form and content to the fledgling discipline of Informal Logic. At that conference, ideas and experiences were shared and a vision developed that allowed people to leave the symposium firm in the knowledge that they were not alone in seeing the benefits of studying argumentation as it emerges in everyday life. A coherent research agenda had begun to develop. To learn more about that first conference, please refer to the panel presentations of some of those who were in attendance which are collected elsewhere on this disk.

A tremendous amount has happened in the last 25 years, not least of which is the development of a large international community of scholars and teachers interested in Informal Logic, and a related body of literature covering a wealth of pedagogic and theoretical issues. Along with the maturity of the field as a source of good research and ideas on improving the teaching environment, has been an interest in it from scholars in related fields and disciplines. Those working in Communication Studies, Psychology, Rhetoric, and what is more broadly called 'Argumentation Theory', have been drawn to the work of informal logicians and the problems that engage them because of similar concerns and interests. Thus, the 25th anniversary of that first symposium seemed a fitting time to bring together many of the people working in the area, along with those of associated interests, to discuss the current state of Informal Logic, to celebrate its successes and to reflect on what still remains to be done.

The success of this venture can easily be gauged by perusing the papers that appear on this disk. They represent the large majority of those that were presented at the conference, along with thoughtful commentaries on those papers. The range of papers is impressive, giving us a brilliant snapshot of some of the best research currently being done in Informal Logic, along with reports on its teaching from across the world. The depth of the discussion in the papers and commentaries gives testimony to how far the field has come in 25 years, while at the same time showing how complex the issues are that still occupy us.

Clearly, the first 25 years have been a wonderful start to a much-needed area of study, and a very firm foundation on which to build for the future. We can only imagine what ideas and concerns will welcome scholars and teachers as they gather for the 50th anniversary.

'Informal Logic at 25' was held at the University of Windsor, Windsor Ontario on May 14-17, 2003 as the fourth in a series of conferences on Informal Logic, and the fifth in the series of biannual conferences organized by the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation. As with the previous OSSA conferences, our program was decided with the assistance of a committee. We issued a call for papers in the spring of 2002, inviting abstracts of proposed presentations. These were blind-refereed by the Program Committee later that fall. From the many good proposals we received, the program of papers appearing on this disc was selected.
We wish to thank the people who agreed to serve on the Program Committee with us:

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Finally, our thanks once again to the people who participated in the conference. Your enthusiasm for debate and discussion and the high quality of the work you share makes the organizing of events like this a truly rewarding experience.

JAB
HVH
RHJ
CWT - Conference Organizers
1.0 Introduction

This project is a microanalysis of a private graduate student electronic mailing list. The mailing list is private in the sense that subscribers are restricted to Master’s and Ph.D. candidates in the Division of Humanities from Maple Leaf University, a large metropolitan university in Canada. From observations I have been able to make of approximately six months of archived messages, the tone of the mailing list generally fosters collegiality and serves as a tool for disseminating information relevant to humanities graduate students; however, an ethic of camaraderie among colleagues does not always reign. I examine one such interruption of collegiality, and how participants attend to it.

I initially gained access to the mailing list by virtue of being part of the division of Humanities. My interest in what was said on the mailing list was piqued when Jennifer, an acquaintance, began discussing with me her experience of what she believed to be silencing by male colleagues on the list. Upon my expressed interest in analyzing Jennifer’s anecdotal report of having been silenced, I secured the informed consent to make public the messages of those who participated in a series of exchanges that occurred during a five day time frame and six-hundred and eleven lines of text. I selected these particular dates and text for analysis because the discourse that occurred during this span is rife with conflict and negotiation as participants attempt to communicate and interpret messages without the paralinguistic cues they have otherwise come to know one another by in their face-to-face interactions.

2.0 Details about the Medium

At the time of my analysis a total of thirty students subscribe to the humanities mailing list, ten of whom are women and twenty of whom are men. Of those subscribed, one third are ‘lurkers’ (in other words, have never posted a message to the list). The mailing list is unmoderated, therefore messages may be sent by anyone who is subscribed to it. Messages are not filtered by a moderator; and any humanities graduate student can subscribe to the list by sending a message to one of two list owners. The mailing list itself operates on a Maple Leaf University (hereafter, MLU) mail server.