

AFTERTHOUGHTS —

from CCCC Associate Chair Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt



I had followed Jose Antonio Vargas ever since he “came out” as “undocumented” in the *New York Times*. I knew he was an engaging, funny, personable speaker and a passionate, dedicated activist who worked in print and digital media, all of which I thought would make him attractive to a CCCC

audience. I knew his story would resonate with many CCCC members, and I knew that his message was particularly salient at the time, in the midst of immigration orders, border walls, and increasing hate speech and violence related to immigrants.

What struck me most (and as 2017 Convention Chair, pleased me tremendously) was the way in which he crafted his message to fit a CCCC audience—a careful balance of humor and confrontation, of sharing his story, reporting facts, and pressing for accountability and action: “We [undocumented immigrants] are here because you weren’t there,” he quips. “The US came to our countries.” He asked, “How are you showing up for us?” “What are you doing to earn your citizenship?” he pressed. Eloquent and disarming, he connected to the audience as educators, writers, and activists, creating the sense of intimacy in the packed ballroom.

We were “with” him, from start to finish.

Vargas humanizes the issue. He embodies rhetoric. He has a surprising willingness to engage—and engage productively—with those who demonize him.

A photograph of Jose Antonio Vargas speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark suit and a white shirt. He is holding a microphone and gesturing with his hands. Another man in a dark suit is standing next to him, also gesturing. The background is a plain wall.

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Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Define American CEO, and media start-up #EmergingUS founder Jose Antonio Vargas was a keynote speaker at the 2017 Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). His keynote address related to his work advocating for immigration reform. Vargas’s work embodies “cultivating capacity, creating change through writing and digital media.”