

Society for Anthropological Sciences Virtual Spring Meeting

Society for Anthropological Sciences

By Douglas W. Hume

November 30, 2020

When the spring 2020 Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA)/Society for Anthropological Sciences (SAS) annual meetings in Albuquerque were cancelled, SAS leadership began discussing what options were available to us for deferring presentations to sometime in the future, joining the SfAA online presentations, or holding our own online meeting. As a board member, I strongly recommended to others that we hold an online meeting consisting of the papers that had already been submitted and accepted to our sessions for the SfAA meeting. We knew that there were individuals who needed this presentation for promotion or hiring in the upcoming year, and we all wanted to keep SAS as active as possible during the pandemic. The SAS Executive Board decided to hold our own online spring meeting, where I would take a leadership role in organizing and running the meeting. What follows is a first-person account of how we were able to create an online academic meeting with only a couple of weeks preparation.

Fortunately, I had the technical knowledge and capabilities to host the meetings online. I have an institutional Zoom and a personal YouTube account that allows me to upload videos of any length. I sent an email to all the SAS presenters (posters and papers, not workshops) to assess who wanted to participate in this alternate format. Of the 22 paper presenters planned for the spring meetings, 11—exactly half—wanted to present online. I think that after the fact there were others that would have participated if they knew how well it turned out.

Stephen Lyon (SAS president) and I worked together during the meetings. I ran a Mac with Zoom broadcasting to YouTube, and a PC with my email, YouTube feed, and program next to each other on my desk.



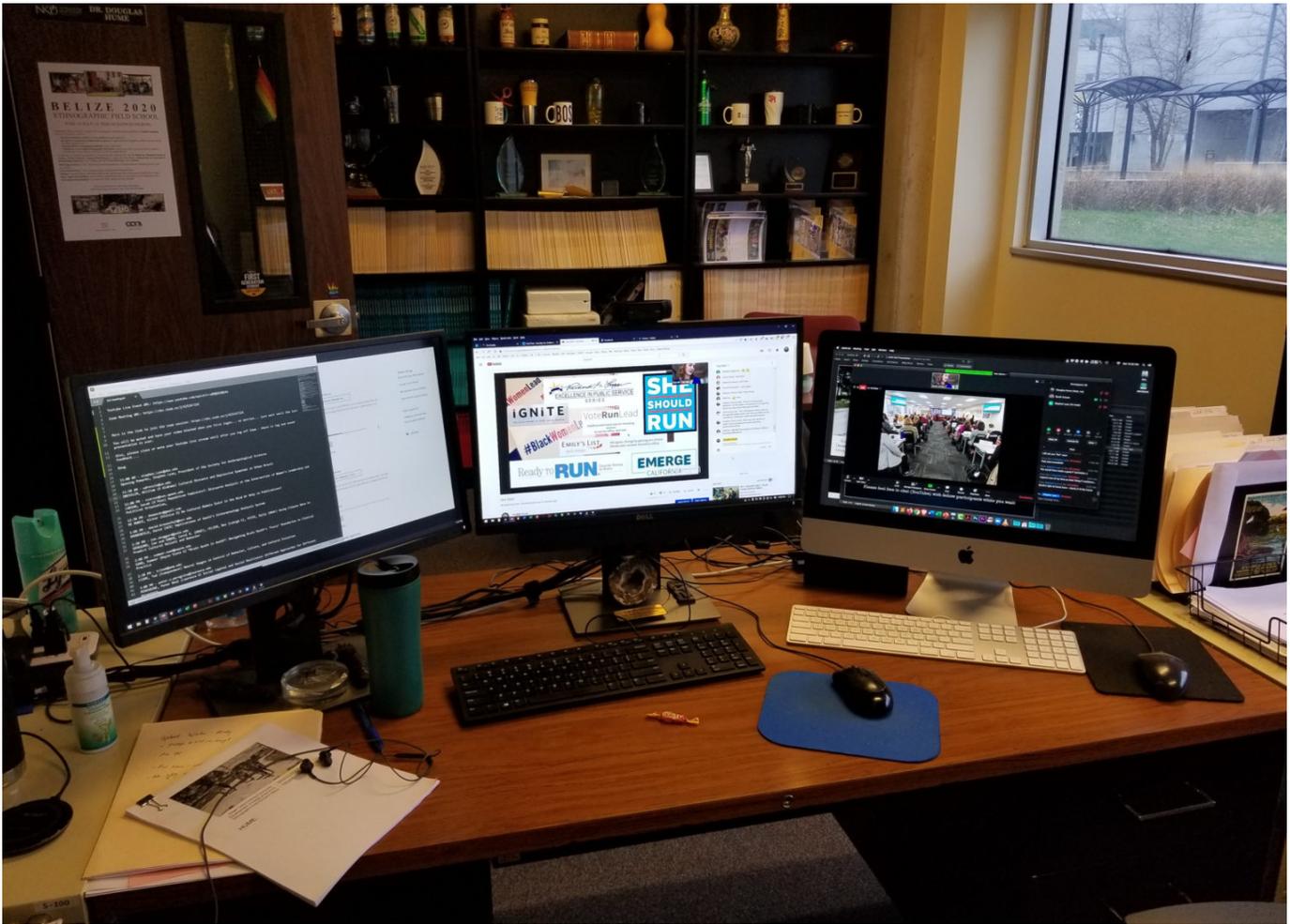


Image description: Three monitors, two keyboards, and two computer mice rest on top of a wood desk. Various windows are open on the monitor screens. Bookshelves line the far wall and contain a variety of object ranging from books to drinkware.

Caption: The command center for the SAS virtual spring meeting in 2020. Douglas W. Hume

Only the presenters, Stephen, and I were ever on Zoom. Zoom has a feature that allows live broadcast through YouTube. The audience was able to watch the presentation and interact with presenters and each other through the chat feature. Just before the beginning of each session, I emailed the Zoom room information to each presenter, mute them when they entered, and let them watch the last presentation end while I text chatted with them any last-minute information. Then, when a presenter was finished, I would remove them from the Zoom meeting. This part went well—we always have small technical issues when presenters are changed at the meetings, so it was not much more difficult. One presenter lives in eastern Europe and was worried that his internet connection would not be stable for a live presentation—it would also be very late in his time zone. Therefore, he recorded his presentation and posted it to YouTube, where I downloaded it and livestreamed a screen capture of his video. It worked well, except he was not available for questions.

All attendees watched the livestream on YouTube. I watched this just to make sure that everything was working—noting that there is about a 30 second lag between Zoom and

YouTube. Stephen served as the meeting chair, introducing speakers, and then watching the YouTube Live chat to collect questions for after the presentation. Presentations were about 20 minutes with about 10 minutes of questions. This system worked well, as the presenter was not interrupted by the YouTube feed which the presenters turned off when they were presenting, and watchers would post questions as they came to mind and did not need to make notes or remember them for after the presentation. I turned up the spam and language filters for the chat and was ready to ban people, but we did not have any issues arise. I do not enable comments on my YouTube channel, and it is not monetized.

After the presentations were over, we took a quick break and had our business meeting, where the entire board was on Zoom and the meeting was livestreamed on YouTube.

After the day of the meetings, I posted a link to [all presentations](#) (time-stamped links to two videos) for all to see. Both the presentations and chat are archived there.

We now have about 500 views of the presentation video, having around 40 people at any one time watching the live event. The participation during the live event is approximately the same number of people we have as audience members at in-person meetings.

We did not charge a fee for presenters or audience members—we wanted it open for all.

Even if the SfAA is face-to-face in 2021, SAS is already discussing the possibility of having one or two live virtual sessions for those scholars that cannot make the meeting—having me on a Zoom Room at the meetings with the presenters off site—with some people watching in person and others online. It could increase our participation rates at the meeting and allow for more equity and inclusiveness due to distance, funding, and other barriers to traveling to in-person meetings!

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