To the CANE Membership:

After consulting with the other officers today, I have made the necessary, if regrettable, decision to cancel the CANE Annual Meeting scheduled for next weekend, 13-14 March, 2020. As states close to our region and from which presenters hail, including New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, begin to declare a state of emergency, we have taken stock of the situation with regard to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the public health implications of large gatherings, and the ways that institutions are deciding to handle it. For the protection of everyone involved in this conference, our best course of action is to take a path that may be merely prudent today, but will likely become unavoidable by the end of the week. By choosing to take this action now, we hope to give attendees more time to adjust to this likely outcome.

Action become necessary when our host institution, Trinity College in Hartford, CT, on Friday afternoon adopted a policy that would make it difficult for us to go forward with the meeting. According to Trinity’s policy, “Visitors who have been in a CDC Warning Level 3 area within the past 14 days are not permitted on campus at this time. Likewise, visitors who have been in a U.S. location in the past 14 days where a state of emergency or public health emergency has been declared due to COVID-19 are not permitted on campus at this time.” (See https://www.trincoll.edu/advisories/covid-19-updates/ for the policy in its entirety.)
That means that anyone who has been in any one of several states from which our presenters and attendees are coming would not be able to attend; the states include our neighbors in New York, a significant presence in this year’s program. No New England states have declared emergencies to date, but the number of cases in, for instance, Massachusetts is growing and such a declaration would be devastating to the meeting this year. More than half of our membership (including the President and President-Elect!) would not be allowed to come to the place where we would be meeting. While Trinity’s stance may have forced this decision upon us, for our fellow members in the groups most susceptible to the worst effects of the virus—the elderly and the immunocompromised—we agree that this decision is the right course under bad circumstances.

CANE’s Executive Committee will meet in the coming week to decide on how to proceed from here. We will be working on refunding registration fees. We are also actively exploring the possibility of being able to organize a substitute meeting or meetings in the late spring or early summer to allow scholars and teachers to present their research and pedagogical workshops. If such a meeting seems feasible, the changes proposed to the CANE constitution will happen at that time.

Please accept my apologies and those of the CANE Executive Committee for this inconvenience. Believe me, it is not something I or any of us want to do. But we believe it to be the right thing to do.

Ex corde,

John Higgins
President, CANE