Foreword

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It is quite an honor to help introduce the fourth volume of research that utilizes the C-SPAN Archives as its primary source material. My relationship with C-SPAN began quite early in my career as an educator. In fact, I recall as a college student being one of those political junkies often glued to C-SPAN for the pageantry, power, and drama of our national civic conversation. Whether to enjoy a State of the Union Address, or perhaps my marathon-viewing of the daylong events of a presidential inauguration; to partake in the confirmation hearings of a Supreme Court nominee; to catch a daily press briefing from the White House; or just to listen in on the House and Senate floor proceedings, I found the broadcasts of our national political processes to be an essential part of my media diet, and still do. Even before I had formally taken up the study of media effects, including such notions as news framing and media bias, I understood the value of “hearing it straight from the horse’s mouth,” which allowed me to be a bit less dependent on media interpreters who themselves may be influenced by corporate or partisan and ideological interests. Indeed, I understood that the more unvarnished account of our daily politics could be found on C-SPAN.

Very early in my career as an assistant professor of communication at the University of Oklahoma, I had the great pleasure of attending a workshop for educators at the C-SPAN studios in Washington, DC. Later, C-SPAN founder
Brian Lamb was a keynote speaker at a conference on civic engagement hosted by OU’s Political Communication Center and the National Communication Association just before the 2000 presidential election. Then several years after that, when I was teaching an undergraduate political communication course at the University of Missouri, my students enjoyed a visit to our campus by the C-SPAN bus. I know my story is not unique—That countless educators and students since C-SPAN’s founding in 1979 have utilized its many resources, especially the C-SPAN Archives housed in the Purdue Research Park and available online now for the past 30 years. As a scholar of political communication, and one who studies presidential campaigns and campaign communication, including political advertising and televised presidential debates, I can think of no other resource that I have used more often in the classroom and in my own research than the programming and archival resources of C-SPAN.

The current volume of research demonstrates the creative intellectual juices that the C-SPAN Archives fosters. As in the first three volumes, the featured studies span methodological and intellectual boundaries and represent the broad topic areas that constitute C-SPAN programming. The chapters that follow analyze public policy debates, congressional speeches and proceedings, testimony provided in congressional hearings, presidential campaign communication, citizens’ responses as part of the political communication process, C-SPAN resources as civics education, and C-SPAN as a resource for journalists. Both broad and focused, these essays cut a wide and successful path through the Archives’ intellectual riches.

Little did I know when C-SPAN first sustained my political junkie habit, even before I had decided on a college major and a career path as a teacher and scholar of political communication, that my need for it would be a lifelong addiction. My daily C-SPAN fix, even then, was most likely influential in the selection of my life’s work. As we’ve now entered a troubling era of “fake news” and “alternative facts” most dangerous to our democracy, we must have a resource such as C-SPAN that provides us with the primary source and official record of our national political dialogue. As we lament the lack of civics knowledge among our citizenry, especially our youngest citizens, C-SPAN provides educators and classrooms at all levels access to the greatest resources available for civics education. Truly, we are fortunate to have
this national treasure, and fortunate to enjoy yet another collection of outstanding studies that have mined the vast resources of the C-SPAN Archives.

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