

CAUCE Institutional Members' Survey: A Snapshot

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ABSTRACT

Continuing education in Canadian universities is currently at a type of crossroads. It is being affected by a number of factors, including recent changes in the economy; the different approaches universities are taking to continuing education, which range from centralized to decentralized models; and the blending of continuing education with areas such as online and distance education. Given these circumstances, the CAUCE Executive, under the leadership of Tracey Taylor-O'Reilly, CAUCE president, and Lorraine Carter, its Research Committee chair, designed and disseminated an institutional members' survey

RÉSUMÉ

L'éducation permanente dans les universités canadiennes arrive actuellement à un genre de carrefour. Elle est affectée par un certain nombre de facteurs, y compris des changements récents dans l'économie ; les approches différentes que les universités prennent à l'égard de l'éducation permanente, ce qui varie entre des modèles centralisés et décentralisés ; et le mélange du secteur d'éducation permanente avec d'autres domaines, par exemple l'éducation à distance et en ligne. Étant donné ces circonstances, le comité exécutif de l'AE-PUC, sous le leadership de Tracey Taylor-O'Reilly, présidente de

in Spring 2009. The ultimate goal of this initiative was to generate a snapshot of the needs of CAUCE's institutional members and to use these findings to plan programs and services that reflect the needs of the membership. Further, the Executive intends to repeat the survey every few years. This article reports the key findings of the survey as descriptive statistics and recurring messages offered in open-ended questions and as additional comments.

l'AÉPUC, et Lorraine Carter, présidente du comité de recherche, ont conçu et distribué un sondage des membres-organismes au printemps 2009. Cette initiative a pour but de générer un portrait des besoins des membres-organismes de l'AÉPUC et d'utiliser ces résultats pour planifier des programmes et services qui reflètent les besoins du membership. De plus, le comité exécutif a l'intention de répéter le sondage à des intervalles de quelques années. Cet article rapporte les résultats clés du sondage en tant que statistiques descriptives et messages récurrents tels que présentés dans les questions ouvertes et commentaires additionnels.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Association of University Continuing Education (CAUCE) is an organization dedicated to university-based continuing education in Canada and to the educational and professional development needs of its members. As an organization, CAUCE has institutional and affiliate members. Although CAUCE values all of its members, those who participate as institutional members represent the vast majority.

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CAUCE supports deans, directors, senior administrative professionals, and practitioners (persons who work in program development, program management, instructional design, marketing, and other related roles). All

of these persons were the target of the survey. Prepared as a Web-based survey, it was made available to participants through the CAUCE listserv and the members-only section of the website; the last section of the survey was available to deans and directors only.

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TOOL DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

Content and design ideas for the survey were derived from several sources. Through relationships with sister organizations that have recently completed similar consultations with their memberships, such as the Association of Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) and the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA), the research leads developed a series of questions in line with the overall goal of the project. These items and the general organization of the survey were validated with the CAUCE Executive and six CAUCE members from different institutions. A research assistant with expertise in survey design reviewed all questions for logic and appropriateness. When uploaded to the Web, the survey was tested for ease of navigation.

Deans and directors were advised of the survey's launch date in advance so they could encourage their staff to participate in it when it became available. Institutional members were advised of the survey in advance through a listserv message and announcements were made at the annual spring conference, held in Vancouver, BC. The survey was launched during the conference and remained open for six weeks. Reminder emails were sent through the listserv to potential participants on two occasions. Participants accessed the survey in two ways: through a link embedded in a message circulated via the listserv and through a link on the members-only section of the website.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Laurentian University, the home university of the chair of the CAUCE Research Committee.

GENERAL ORGANIZATION OF SURVEY

The survey included 26 questions that were available to all participants and an additional 8 questions for deans and directors only. The 26 questions were designed to gather data in five areas: respondent information; CAUCE

member services; professional development; the annual CAUCE conference; and continuing education in general. Most questions used Likert scales, but some open-ended questions were included. In the section targeting administrators, respondents were asked to complete questions about the value of CAUCE to their organizations and in relation to their staff.

ANALYSIS

Survey responses were organized to generate descriptive statistics. Data derived from the open-ended questions were read and organized by themes by the research team in order to identify dominant messages.

FINDINGS

Respondent Information

In all, 117 persons completed the survey. (The demographic findings reported here pertain to all participants, including deans and directors.) The job category selected by the greatest percentage of participants (57.70%) was program coordinator/manager/director. The dominant age group of participants was 50–59 years (37.60%) and the mean years of experience in continuing education was 14.90. Geographically, Western Canada was represented most substantively at 46.80%, with Eastern Canada at 27.00% and Central Ontario at 26.10%. Since participants were not asked to identify their institutions, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured for the respondents.

Participants were asked about their involvement with CAUCE, and presented with five options (Executive member; committee member; conference host; presenter at CAUCE conference; not active in a specific role), to which they responded: not active in a specific role, 52.40%; presenter at CAUCE conference, 36.20%; committee member, 28.60%; conference host, 15.20%; Executive member, 14.30%. These data reflect multiple involvements for some participants. In addition, 65 participants reported belonging to other associations/organizations.

In the last question of this section, participants were invited to share any additional comments they might have. Four recurring messages emerged: 1) appreciation for the survey; 2) interest in knowing more about CAUCE; 3) a sense of valuing CAUCE as an organization; and 4) interest in “modernizing [CAUCE’s] services” by incorporating distance-education formats and management topics into its professional development offerings, partnering with other organizations, and reviewing the cost of the conference fees in light of today’s economic climate and the options available through technology.

CAUCE Member Services

The responses in this and the remaining sections involved a five-point Likert scale: low, somewhat low, moderate, somewhat high, and high. For reporting purposes, categories were collapsed as "low," "moderate," and "high." All of the included percentages represent response percentages.

Table 1 reports on services and opportunities currently offered by CAUCE from two perspectives: value and satisfaction. (Note that the table includes only those services and opportunities reported as "high.")

Table 1: *Services and opportunities reported as highly valued and highly satisfactory*

Service/Opportunity	High Value	High Satisfaction
Journal (<i>CJUCE</i>)	--	57.89%
Bulletin	--	--
Distance education directory	--	--
Handbook	--	--
Listserv	50.98%	50.54%
Conference	79.05%	72.92%
Pre-conference workshop	--	55.71%
Deans and directors' meeting	73.44%	70.37%
Professional development	72.54%	63.74%
Research grant program	--	--
Awards	61.46%	53.49%
Marketing awards	52.52%	50.00%
Advocacy in continuing education	87.62%	65.96%

When asked about new services they would like if CAUCE could offer them, participants selected the following services from a provided list as their top four: leadership development program; attracting and brokering new continuing education (CE) business opportunities; a continuing education 101 course (for new CE professionals); and webinars.

When asked about other services that would be valuable, participants identified a number of areas. First, several respondents commented on CAUCE's important role in advocacy, their comments reflecting many different targets and purposes, including advocating for government funding for CE, collecting CE statistics to use for advocacy with government, enhancing members' capacity to advocate for their CE units within their universities, and advocating with career counsellors and human resource associations. A second area, collecting and reporting on national data, trends, and benchmarks within the Canadian CE landscape, was reported as something that would be useful to members. The third area to be identified was strengthening the role that CAUCE plays in facilitating connections

and networking opportunities among people who do similar kinds of work. Fourth, participants spoke about the need for CAUCE to establish forums for members to share materials, templates, ideas, and so forth. And, finally, interest was expressed in enhanced sharing of what is happening in CE in other countries.

The survey asked about the value of DistanceEdCanada, a national database that, at the time of the survey, was generating national discussion. DistanceEdCanada is a repository where interested parties can learn about course and program offerings through distance education. Some 65.20% of participants reported that they felt this database would benefit continuing education; they further expressed, through an open-comment box, that, while the concept of the database was a good one, much work was required to make it practical and effective. Others reported not knowing about the database, while still others recommended that CAUCE should not only become active in the redesign of the database but also become more in tune with distance education in general.

Professional Development

The top two responses from a provided list to the question "How does your institution support your professional development?" were reimburses direct expenses for professional development (89.30%) and provides me with time off for professional development (89.30%). No respondents reported a lack of institutional support for professional development. Other professional-development supports noted in the comment box included a policy on professional development for CE staff; financial incentives and reimbursements; and the opportunity to complete specialty training in adult and continuing education. By comparison, the outstanding barriers to participation in professional development were lack of time (68.60%) and cost (40.00%). In the comment box for this question, participants spoke at length about cutbacks and budget freezes and how these circumstances affected their ability to attend conferences. Other comments focused on the need for professional development activities to be directly relevant to practice; conflicts with conference dates; an interest in professional development enabled by technology; and the challenges of participating in professional development when the CE staff is small.

The top three professional development topics identified as helpful by respondents were leadership development (57.70%), marketing strategies (52.30%), and program development (50.50%). Table 2 has the complete list of topics.

Table 2: Professional development topics that would help at work

Answer Options	Response Percent
Leadership development	57.70%
Evaluation and assessment strategies	42.30%
Program development	50.50%
Legal and ethical issues	29.70%
Partnership building	44.10%
International programming	43.20%
Distance education	39.60%
Student retention	30.60%
Marketing strategies	52.30%
Finance	15.30%
Student services	23.40%
Needs assessment	35.10%
Understanding academic culture	14.40%
Instructional design	26.10%
Market research	43.20%
Contract training	22.50%
Community engagement	36.00%
Degree completion programs	22.50%
Conference and institutes	18.90%
Organizational change	38.70%
Other (please specify)	5.40%

The top two preferred formats for professional development were webinars and conferences. Further details are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Preferred formats for professional development

Answer Options	Response Percent
Teleconference	32.40%
Webinars (Web-based workshops/sessions)	64.90%
Half-day pre-conference workshops/sessions	43.20%
Conferences that offer a mix of professional development, plenary speakers, best practices, and networking	68.50%
Electronic bulletin boards/discussion forums	18.90%
Blogs	12.60%
Webcasts	30.60%
Other (please specify)	5.40%

CAUCE Conference

When asked about attendance at a CAUCE conference in the last three years, 65.50% of respondents reported attending. The setting where the greatest percentage had attended was Vancouver, BC (64.80%), followed by London, ON (59.20%) and Edmonton, AB (49.30%).

Based on recent conference attendance (the last three years), participants were asked to identify conference benefits in relation to their expertise and professional development in particular areas. Networking with other colleagues was rated as highly valued by 87.72% of respondents and marketing by 50.00%; benefits rated as of low value were ethics in continuing education (54.72%) and faculty development (54.35%).

Respondents identified several items as highly important in influencing their attendance at the conference. The top three factors were institutional support to attend (85.71%); concurrent sessions and workshop presentations (85.71%); and work schedule allowing attendance (85.07%). Location of the conference within driving distance of the respondent's home institution was of low importance to 67.84% of respondents.

Continuing Education in General

In this section of the survey, participants were invited to reflect on the function of continuing education within their home universities. The open-ended question "Is continuing education generally valued at your organization?" produced five general messages: 1) yes; 2) no; 3) the value of CE relates to its capacity to generate revenue; 4) not-for-credit tends to mean not valued; and 5) distance education continues to increase in importance. While some respondents expressed delight at "still [being] here" and hence feeling

valued by their universities, others were clear in their views of not being valued, stating "Not At All ...! We are an afterthought. There is no reference to Cont. Education in the university's strategic plan ..." and "No, it is not valued. Full-time on-campus students are the primary focus." Those who felt valued often tied this value to the unit's capacity to generate funds; there were several references to the CE unit being a kind of "cash cow" in "challenging economic times." As for non-credit programming, the general comment was that "non-credit CE is not [valued]." Comparatively speaking, distance education was perceived to be in a strengthening and more-valued position.

Despite the mixed nature of the responses to how CE is valued within the respondents' universities, 68.80% anticipated that CE would become more important within their universities over the next three years. The principal reasons for anticipating this increased value were the revenue generation achieved by most CE units; declining traditional enrolments at universities; and the educational opportunities that CE units offer that meet the needs of today's adult learner/worker who, in poor economic times, often retrain and seek educational opportunities such as those offered through CE.

Deans and Directors

The survey section dedicated to the deans and directors of CE units included two questions related to value and five more-specific questions. This section had 39 respondents.

Asked what they valued most about the institutional membership, the deans and directors indicated professional networking; the deans and directors' meeting; professional development opportunities for staff and self; collaborative opportunities; awareness of national and international trends; the CAUCE conference; and various services and benefits, including the journal (*CJUCE*), the CAUCE handbook, and research papers. As for whether they felt their units were getting sufficient value for the cost of the institutional membership, 87.90% of them indicated yes. In the comment section on the cost of the institutional membership, the consensus was that the investment was relatively modest while the return in areas such as networking was substantive. It was also suggested that CAUCE may want to create a way for CE staff to have enhanced access to information that is relevant to daily practice.

The other, more-specific, questions pertained to the CAUCE conference and professional development. The respondents recommended several changes to the conference so it might better meet the needs of staff. These changes included targeted professional development opportunities; technologically based delivery of specific sessions for those who could not attend the conference; strong keynote speakers, such as policy-makers who could make direct connections to continuing education; pre-conference sessions/

workshops; increased attention to the awards' programs; early sharing of the conference program; a stream for administrative assistants; a welcome session for newcomers; a mentoring program; strongly focused programs; less weekend time for the conference; and strategies to entice distance-education and management professionals to CAUCE and the conference.

Regarding their own professional development needs, the deans and directors identified several factors: working with traditional university departments and academic culture in general; internal and external marketing techniques; a best-practices repository for CE staff; organizational change; empowerment; leadership and strategies for developing leaders; succession planning; advocacy; curriculum/program development and assessment; financial models for different types of programming; data about CE across Canada; coordinated information and data sharing; techniques for liaising and asking questions of others; and management of ESL needs. Electronic means such as the Web were recommended as preferred formats for professional development.

When asked about preferred professional-development options for staff, the deans and directors preferred two complementary modes of delivery: in person (such as conferences and workshops) and Internet-based (such as webinars and on-demand learning). Table 4 has the complete list of their responses.

Table 4: *Preferred formats for staff professional development*

Answer Options	Response Percent
Teleconference	53.10%
Webinars (Web-based workshops/sessions)	78.10%
Half-day pre-conference workshops/sessions	46.90%
Conferences that offer a mix of professional development, plenary speakers, best practices, and networking	62.50%
Electronic bulletin boards/discussion forums	34.40%
Blogs	9.40%
Webcasts	37.50%
Other (please specify)	6.30%

When asked to identify conference benefits to a staff member/members who had attended the conference during the last three years, the deans and directors noted the following benefits to be of high value: networking with other colleagues (95.00%), professional development (52.63%), and marketing (50.00%). Noted as of moderate value were resource management and allocation (60.00%) and ethics in continuing education (50.00%). Faculty development was identified as of low value (53.84%).

Respondents viewed three factors as highly important in influencing staff attendance at the conference: institutional support (95.24%), personal schedule (80.00%), and work schedule (78.95%). Role as presenter was noted as moderately important (50.00%), while location in a town/city with a large university was of low importance (50.00%).

DISCUSSION

Based on the size of the institutional membership of CAUCE and the response rates to other surveys recently conducted with its members, the response rate to this survey was satisfactory. The general preparatory work completed by the research team in designing and disseminating the survey, the support of the Executive, the assistance of individual members in vetting questions, and the expertise of the research assistant were contributors to its success. The higher rate of participation by members in Western Canada is understandable since the survey was launched at the CAUCE conference held in Vancouver, BC.

The respondent-information data indicated that a number of the survey participants were connected to CAUCE through institutional memberships but were not active in the organization. Because much of what the membership requested through this survey requires volunteers, important work has to be done to engage and involve members.

As an organization, CAUCE struggles with the diverse interests of its members, who vary significantly in their continuing- and distance-education mandates and other activities. This diversity is reflected in the services-related interests expressed by the participants and merits further discussion.

Interestingly, the most valued service, according to this survey, was also the most diverse and confusing. Although respondents stated quite clearly that they valued advocacy and would like to see CAUCE take a stronger role in this area, the targets and purposes of such advocacy varied widely. Not insignificantly, during the year prior to this survey, the Executive struggled with the issue of finding a common purpose in its advocacy work that would benefit CAUCE's diverse membership. Recently, a short-term focus was determined: CAUCE will collect national data on CE and, working with the Association of Universities and Colleges (AUCC), use this data to advocate with the federal and provincial governments. Based on this survey, it would appear that the CAUCE leadership is on the right track. Sustained discussion about advocacy goals by the deans and directors will provide clarity and direction for this important work.

Survey respondents made clear recommendations related to the planning of the national conference, on topics for future professional development activities, and for the sharing of information, resources, and ideas that will

support members in their work. Technology was recommended as a tool in some of these undertakings. Enhancing CAUCE's role in brokering CE business opportunities was also noted as important.

The respondents' views on DistanceEdCanada, while mixed, revealed that continuing education is being affected by the growth and development in distance education across Canada and that members are eager to have a coordinated, current, and high-functioning public directory. Whether the current DistanceEdCanada—a partnership between the Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL) and the University of Guelph—is modified or another option is developed, members are interested in this type of repository.

The outstanding message regarding professional development was that members are experiencing financial cutbacks within their organizations and that this, along with workload issues, impedes members' ability to attend conferences. Easy-to-access, short, timely, and cost-effective solutions are required to meet the needs of CAUCE members.

The message about distance modalities and professional development was twofold. First, members expressed interest in short formal-learning opportunities, such as webinars and webcasts of conference sessions. At the same time, there was interest in less-formal, on-demand learning and sharing opportunities, such as discussion forums and repositories of materials and practices. Interestingly, CAUCE is ahead of its American sister organizations, the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA) and the Association of Continuing Higher Education (ACHE), with respect to offering distance learning to members via teleconference (e.g., the Dial-and-Discuss series). Thus, CAUCE has an opportunity to enhance this strength by providing further professional development through cost-effective, technology-enabled means. By comparison, with respect to less-formal electronic sharing, UCEA is well ahead of CAUCE with its introduction of UCEAConnect last year. The results of this survey suggest that CAUCE may wish to explore similar options. Second, despite an expressed interest in the use of distance-learning tools, members continued to value the face-to-face interactions of the conference and the deans and directors' meeting. Networking and connecting were unquestionably valued by CAUCE members, and these two forums continued to be recognized as crucial in enabling relationships.

As for the next steps, the CAUCE Executive and committees will use the recommendations of this study for planning purposes. However, given its limited resources and volunteers, the organization will not be able to respond to all of the identified needs. To enhance its capacity to address these needs, CAUCE may choose to reach out to other associations and/or educational providers, including its own members with expertise in specific

areas such as distance education, to discover new ways for its members to contribute. Further involvement by members in supporting new and/or enhanced services is critical.

Although respondents displayed mixed views on how continuing education is currently valued in their respective institutions, they seemed generally positive about the future. Given this general optimism, CAUCE may have a role to play in helping members actualize this future. Through data collection related to continuing education and advocacy work, CAUCE may be able to help members raise the profile of CE units and increase the perceived value of CE within institutions.

From the perspective of the deans and directors, it was clear that CAUCE provides value to CE units across the country. In order to continue to provide value for the membership more generally, their recommendations about the conference and professional development will be taken into consideration in planning.

CONCLUSION

Although its members continue to value and look to CAUCE for leadership and practical guidance, CAUCE as an organization will only be as strong as its members. It is, therefore, vital that the organization be aware and responsive to the expressed needs of its membership. At the same time, its capacity to meet these needs requires a healthy level of involvement by members. Within CAUCE, there are unquestionably people with the talent and expertise necessary to give life to the results of this study. It is now our collective challenge to bring these talents and areas of expertise forward and to strengthen the profession of university continuing education in Canada.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Lorraine Carter is the Chair of the CAUCE Information and Research Committee and a faculty member in the School of Nursing at Laurentian University.

Dr Lorraine Carter est présidente du comité d'information et de recherche de l'AÉPUC et membre de la faculté de l'École des sciences infirmières de l'Université Laurentienne.

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