

Forum / Tribune

A Survey of the Professional Development Needs and Interests of CAUCE Members

Gordon Thompson, University of Saskatchewan

Walter Archer, University of Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT

In 2002, the CAUCE Professional Development Committee sponsored a survey of CAUCE members to gather information on their professional development needs and interests. This paper presents the results of this survey and compares it with the results of previous surveys. A particularly interesting aspect of the 2002 survey was the results of a self-assessment by CAUCE members on a series of specific professional competencies. In addition, the results of the present survey were discussed at a meeting of CAUCE deans and directors in February 2003 and a summary of that discussion is provided. The paper concludes with some questions and suggestions relating to future surveys.

RÉSUMÉ

En 2002, le comité de développement professionnel de l'AEPUc a commandité un sondage auprès de ses membres afin de rassembler des renseignements sur leurs besoins de développement professionnel et leurs intérêts. Ce document présente les résultats de ce sondage et les compare aux résultats de sondages précédents. Un aspect particulièrement intéressant du sondage de 2002 était les résultats de l'auto-évaluation fait par les membres de l'AEPUc et traitant d'une série de compétences professionnelles spécifiques. De plus, à une réunion des Doyens et Directeurs de l'AEPUc en février 2003, les résultats du sondage actuel ont été discutés et, un résumé de cette discussion est fournie. Les auteurs concluent en posant quelques questions et en faisant des suggestions pour des sondages futurs.

INTRODUCTION

CAUCE surveys its membership periodically for various purposes. Perhaps the best-known of these surveys are those regarding the policies and practices of our continuing education units (Brooke & Morris, 1987; Morris & Potter, 1996). The Professional Development Committee (PDC) of CAUCE has also carried out a series of surveys on the professional development needs of the membership, most recently in 2002. The results of this survey are presented below; they were also presented at the February 28, 2003, meeting of the deans and directors of CAUCE.

Of the previous surveys carried out by the PDC, the 1991 survey was also reported in a Forum contribution to the *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education* (Archer & Wong, 1991). The 1999 survey, however, was not reported in this journal, partly because of the disappointingly low response rate. Nevertheless, the results of that survey were summarized, and a copy of the summary may be obtained, upon request, from the present authors.

This article reports the results of the 2002 survey, with some brief comments interpolated, followed by a brief summary of comments on the survey received at the February 2003 meeting of the deans and directors. The article concludes with some general commentary on the survey results and some recommendations about methodology for future surveys.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was designed in consultation with members of the CAUCE Professional Development Committee (PDC) and pre-tested on a small sample of CAUCE members at several different universities. It is available at the following Web site: www.extension.usask.ca/cauce/ The survey had four sections: background information; current responsibilities and competencies; educational/professional development objectives; and contact information that identified the individual respondents.

Unlike previous surveys undertaken by the PDC, this survey was Web-based, that is, CAUCE members were asked to visit the Web site to complete the survey. Previous surveys had been distributed and submitted by mail. The Web-based survey method was chosen for the 2002 survey because it was more economical to use, it made compilation of the results easier, and it was assumed that its convenience would increase the number of respondents.

The invitation to complete the survey was distributed through CAUCE deans and directors rather than through an individual invitation to each CAUCE member. This approach was taken for two reasons. First, it made the

task easier since the number of deans and directors is far less than the total CAUCE membership. Second, it was assumed that CAUCE members would be more likely to complete the survey if their dean or director encouraged them to do so. A letter was sent in October 2002 to all CAUCE deans and directors, requesting that they make their colleagues and staff members aware of the survey, and how to access it, and encourage them to complete it. Over the next two months, several follow-up letters were sent to encourage maximum participation.

In all, 152 surveys were completed and submitted. Since CAUCE is an organization based upon institutional membership rather than individual membership, it is challenging to determine the actual population being surveyed. The CAUCE Web site lists approximately 630 individuals associated with CAUCE member institutions. Accordingly, the present survey had an estimated response rate of approximately 24% of the total number of CAUCE members. Survey respondents represented 28 CAUCE member institutions, which are listed in Table 1. This represents 53% of the 53 CAUCE member institutions. Based on this, it is reasonable to conclude that the results are generally representative of the population of CAUCE members.

Table 1: *CAUCE Member Institutions Represented by Survey Respondents*

Alberta	Regina
UBC	Royal Roads
Calgary	Ryerson
UCCB	Saint Mary's
Concordia College	Saskatchewan
Dalhousie	SFU
Guelph	Toronto
Laurentian	Trinity Western
McGill	UVic
McMaster	Waterloo
Manitoba	UWO
Memorial	Wilfred Laurier
New Brunswick	Winnipeg
UNBC	York

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although 152 surveys were returned, not every respondent answered every question. In addition, some questions allowed multiple responses. These are noted in the discussion.

In section 1 of the survey, a few key questions were asked to characterize the experiential and educational backgrounds of respondents. The majority of respondents (83 respondents representing 55%) indicated they had worked in the field of Continuing Education for eight or more years. A further 33 respondents (22%) had four to seven years of experience in the field, and 36 respondents (24%) had three or less years. However, almost half (75 respondents representing 49%) of these individuals had been in their present position for three or less years. Of the remaining respondents, 36 (24%) had four to seven years of experience in their present position and 41 (27%) had eight or more years. In sum, the respondents had considerable experience in the field, but many were relatively new to their current responsibilities.

Table 2 presents the highest educational credentials earned by respondents. A total of 81 respondents (53%) had completed a graduate degree. Respondents were also asked whether they had completed a degree, diploma, or certificate in Adult and Continuing Education. Interestingly, only 29 (19%) respondents had such backgrounds. Accordingly, although the respondents were well educated, in general, they lacked formal educational credentials in the field. This finding is consistent with previous surveys of CAUCE member institutions (Brooke & Morris, 1987; Morris & Potter, 1996).

Table 2: *Highest Educational Credential Earned*

Credential	Number	Percent
Certificate/diploma	14	10%
University coursework	7	10%
Bachelor's degree	38	26%
Graduate courses	8	5%
Master's degree	47	32%
Doctoral coursework	11	7%
Doctoral degree	23	16%

In section 2, a few key questions were asked to determine the role played by individual respondents within their UCE unit. Table 3 indicates respondents' job titles that most closely matched their current responsibilities. In some cases, more than one title was identified. Almost half of the respondents identified themselves as a program director or a program coordinator.

Table 3: *Job Title for Current Responsibilities*

Job Title	Number	Percent
Program director/coordinator	73	48%
Marketing director/coordinator	44	29%
Administrative officer	30	20%
Counsellor/Student advisor	24	16%
Dean/director	21	14%
Program assistant	15	10%
Instructional designer	9	6%
Other	23	15%

Table 4 presents the activities that respondents most frequently identified as significant elements of their current workload. Respondents were advised to consider as significant only those activities that represented at least 10% of their workload. Not surprisingly, program administration, program marketing, and program development were the three most frequently identified activities.

Table 4: *Significant Workload Elements*

Workload Elements	Number of Respondents
Program development	84
Program administration	102
Program marketing/promotion	87
Program evaluation	74
Instructional design	39
Financial management	84
Student advising/orientation	53
Personnel management	81
Instructor recruitment/selection	53
Instructor development/mentoring	48
Research	51
Teaching	31
Community outreach	53
Working with advisory committees	60
Online/distance education	51

Respondents were then asked to self-assess their current level of competence in a number of key areas of activity. A summary of these responses is presented in Table 5. Of particular interest were the areas that respondents most frequently identified as those in which they needed greater competence, that is, instructional design, program evaluation, instructor development/mentoring, online/distance education, and personnel management.

Table 5: *Self-assessed Levels of Competence*

	Highly Competent	Sufficiently Competent	Need Greater Competence	N/A
Program development	37	45	26	27
Program administration	61	48	9	21
Program marketing/promotion	26	61	28	19
Program evaluation	17	58	34	22
Instructional design	21	27	35	43
Financial management	30	53	25	24
Student advising/orientation	46	41	10	33
Personnel management	31	54	30	16
Instructor recruitment/selection	24	45	15	44
Instructor development/mentoring	19	35	31	39
Research	22	41	29	32
Teaching	28	34	11	49
Community outreach	22	44	29	33
Working with advisory committee	23	47	24	32
Online/distance education	23	34	30	36

In section 3, respondents were asked about their educational/professional development objectives. Of those who responded, 37 (24%) indicated they were seriously interested in completing a certificate/diploma in Adult and Continuing Education and 46 (30%) were seriously interested in a graduate degree in this field. Table 6 presents a variety of skills that respondents were invited to select as those they were most interested in gaining. Clearly, interest in online learning predominated as the most frequently identified skill area sought. Respondents were also interested in their preferred format for professional development programs. A significant majority preferred Web-based courses and workshops (98 respondents representing 64%) and

residential-style institutes (97 respondents representing 64%). By contrast, only 60 (39%) respondents indicated an interest in audio-conference workshops such as the Dial and Discuss series presently organized by the CAUCE Professional Development Committee.

Table 6: *Skills Sought*

Skill	Number of Respondents
How to manage/direct a continuing education unit	40
Business skills for continuing educators	47
A deeper understanding of programming skills, such as program evaluation, needs assessment and how to use them effectively in the workplace	55
A deeper understanding of adult learners and how to teach them	43
A deeper understanding of available research about adult learners and how to apply this knowledge to my work	52
Ideas and strategies for working effectively with instructors (coaching, professional development, etc.)	56
Expanding knowledge and skill in the area of online learning (using e-learning technologies in the classroom, developing new online markets, etc.)	72

Discussion at the Deans and Directors' Meeting, February 2003

In general, the deans and directors supported having the results of the 2002 survey reported in this Forum. As well, they supported having information on existing certificate and diploma programs sent to those survey respondents who had indicated an interest in this form of professional development.

The deans and directors also confirmed the reliability of this survey by indicating that the reported results were consistent with their knowledge of the characteristics of their own UCE units.

In response to a general question regarding their willingness to provide support (time and money) for the professional development needs of their employees, most of them stated they would do so. In response to a more specific question regarding residential-style professional development institutes, they suggested that some of the existing offerings (e.g., by CHERD and Harvard, and intensive-format CACE courses) were suitable, as was the

intensive-extensive program at UBC (two days residence, six weeks of independent work). OCULL, CAUCE, and CADE were also thought to provide suitable intensive professional development sessions in conjunction with their conferences.

When asked to name the areas of skill and knowledge most lacking among their staff, the deans and directors mentioned a number of items that showed some overlap with the "Skills Sought" (Table 6) by the survey respondents and the areas in which they "Need Greater Competence" (Table 5). However, the deans and directors also mentioned some broader, more outward-looking skills were needed, such as environmental scanning, striving for a culture of excellence, change management, effective lobbying, leadership, transference of learning, and building teams to implement change.

When asked to indicate other issues to which the PDC should direct its attention, the deans and directors recommended activities that would promote the sharing of best practices for providing professional development within organizations. This might be done in a cracker-barrel session at the national or regional conferences or involve the use of electronic forums (e.g., CAUCE-L) for an exchange of ideas. They also suggested leveraging other resources within our institutions (e.g., HR departments, faculties of education) that also provide useful professional development activities. Another suggestion was to allow UCE staff members to register "at the last minute," at no or minimal cost, in relevant courses that were being offered to the public but were running at less than capacity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Professional Development Committee (PDC) of CAUCE carries out surveys primarily to elicit suggestions and opinions as to what sort of professional development activities the membership wants it to organize. For this purpose, a survey that focuses on those who are more likely to be interested in such opportunities is exactly what is needed. In this regard, its surveys have succeeded, judging by the generally successful activities organized by the PDC.

However, the 1991 and 2002 surveys carried out by the PDC did ask some general questions about demographics and working life, and thereby could serve a secondary purpose in addition to giving direction to the PDC. That is, these surveys could supplement the understanding of the nature of university continuing education in Canada that we derive from the much more comprehensive studies done by Brooke & Morris (1987), and Morris & Potter (1996). (We are, by the way, about due for another of these, since Morris & Potter (1996) was based on a survey carried out in 1992.)

We suggest that, if this is to be a secondary purpose of the PD surveys, then there is a methodological issue regarding the representativeness of the sample that needs to be carefully considered. In essence, we will need to be careful to ensure that the respondents to our survey are representative of the broader CAUCE membership. This issue is also important insofar as the comprehensive surveys are concerned, but these surveys typically have very high rates of participation (79% in the 1987 survey and 84% in the 1996 survey). By contrast, the PDC surveys have response rates ranging from 5% to 48%. Accordingly, one can have a higher degree of confidence in the representativeness of the comprehensive surveys. Since the comprehensive surveys are institutionally-based they typically have significantly higher response rates than the PDC surveys which go to individual CAUCE members.

It is important to note that the issue of representativeness is not a concern insofar as the planning and delivery of professional development activities are concerned. For example, let's say that 60 CAUCE members indicate that they have a strong interest in learning more about a particular topic (such as conducting focus group sessions as a way to undertake program evaluation). Even if these 60 individuals were not at all representative of the overall CAUCE membership, it would be reasonable for the PDC to organize such a professional development to meet their needs. The absolute number of respondents indicating an interest in this topic is sufficient for the PDC to proceed. But can we presume that other information gathered in the survey is representative of the CAUCE membership in general for purposes of collecting an accurate picture of the membership? For example, let's say that the survey examines the educational backgrounds of respondents. Can we assume that the information given by survey respondents is representative of the broader membership? Possibly not. There is apt to be a higher response to these surveys from those people who have a significant personal interest in professional development. Accordingly, those who do respond may not be representative of the total membership. Of course we can select one or more respondent characteristics (such as CAUCE region, years of experience in UCE, current job title) to be part of each future survey. This could serve as a "litmus test" of whether the respondents can be considered to be representative of the broader CAUCE membership since we can compare these data with the total CAUCE membership. If we found that the respondents to our survey shared similar characteristics to those reported in the more comprehensive surveys we could be more confident of the representativeness of our survey data.

The issue of the representativeness of the data gathered from respondents to the PDC surveys becomes more compelling when one looks at the regional variations that have occurred in our previous surveys. Each of

the PD surveys (1991, 1999, and 2002) showed a very different geographic patterning of responses. It is possible that this is an artifact of the different methodologies employed. The survey reported by Archer & Wong (1991) was mailed to only a sample of the individuals listed in the CAUCE Handbook of the time. The researchers selected every third individual in the Handbook and mailed a copy of the survey to those individuals. Therefore, to the extent that the CAUCE Handbook is a reasonably accurate representation of the people who work in university continuing education in Canada, this survey was sent to a stratified (by institution) random sample of the population. Of the 224 questionnaires mailed out to this sample of the population, 107 were returned (48%). Since respondents identified their institution, the distribution of responses by region is known.

The 1999 survey was mailed to the Deans and Directors of the CAUCE member institutions, with a request that it be distributed to people working in the continuing education unit and mailed back when completed. Only 36 questionnaires were returned (approximately 5% response rate). One of the questions on that survey inquired about the time zone within which respondents reside. The region of residence can be inferred for the 26 individuals who answered this question.

As noted earlier, the 2002 survey was the first to be done on the Web. Of the 152 individuals who responded (approximately 20% response rate), 113 gave their institutional affiliation, from which their region of residence can be identified.

The approximate regional distribution of responses for the three surveys, then, was as follows:

Date of Survey	Western Region	Central Region	Atlantic Region
1991	38%	38%	24%
1999	34%	19%	46%
2002	66%	20%	14%

The figures in this table are only approximate, as they are based on inferences from only some of the responses in the 1999 and 2002 surveys. Nevertheless, the differences are striking enough to indicate that there was considerable geographic skewing in some or possibly all of these surveys.

As a matter of interest, distribution of returns for the most recent (2002) survey may have come closest to mirroring the distribution of university continuing education personnel across the country. The CAUCE website lists 633 names and vacant positions at the institutional members (August 11, 2003), the geographic distribution of which are: West 358 (57%), Central 154 (24%), and Atlantic 121 (19%). Of course, since the information submitted to CAUCE varies considerably by institution (e.g., some include retirees,

some don't), the membership directory gives only a rough approximation of the actual geographical distribution of UCE personnel. Nonetheless, these figures indicate that the very convenient Web-based methodology used for the 2002 survey could also be used in future surveys designed to give a snapshot of some features of university continuing education in Canada, in addition to their primary purpose of giving direction to the PDC. It may be worthwhile to analyze the results by each of the three geographic regions identified above. Since at least some of the professional development opportunities available to CAUCE members are regionally-based (such as those provided by APACUE and OCULL) it might be helpful to see whether there are regional variations in the professional development needs of CAUCE members.

Accordingly, we recommend that future PDC surveys be designed and implemented with special care given to the representativeness of the respondents if it is intended that the results will complement the less frequent comprehensive surveys. We trust that these observations will be helpful to those who design and conduct future surveys of CAUCE members.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Gordon Thompson is the Director of Adult and Continuing Education programs with the Extension Division at the University of Saskatchewan. He has a Ph.D. in Adult and Continuing Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a former president of CAUCE and was with the continuing education units at the universities of Manitoba and Victoria prior to joining the University of Saskatchewan.

Gordon Thompson est directeur des programmes de formation des adultes et d'éducation permanente avec la Division de formation continue à l'Université de la Saskatchewan. Il détient un Ph. D. en formation des adultes et en éducation permanente de l'Université de Wisconsin-Madison. Il est l'ancien président de l'AEPUK et faisait partie des unités d'éducation permanente aux Universités du Manitoba et de Victoria avant de se joindre à l'Université de la Saskatchewan.

Walter Archer has been Dean of the Extension Division, University of Saskatchewan, since 2001. Prior to that, he was Associate Dean, Research, at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. His Ph.D. is in Intercultural Education.

Walter Archer est doyen de la Division de formation continue à l'Université de la Saskatchewan depuis 2001. Avant cela, il était doyen associé (Recherche) à la Faculté de formation continue de l'Université de l'Alberta. Son doctorât est en éducation interculturelle.