

Forum / Tribune

What's on the Minds of CAUCE Members? CAUCE Institutional Members' Survey 2012

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings based on CAUCE's 2012 institutional members' survey. Findings are considered in relation to an earlier iteration of the same survey in 2009. Three important areas for the reader's consideration emerged. The first is increasing interest by CAUCE members in distance education and technology-supported models and practices. A second key message ties to the value that CAUCE members place on networking with their colleagues. Finally, continuing education units across Canada continue to be valued for their revenue-generating capacity during fiscally challenging times although, at other times, there can be ambivalence towards continuing education.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent document présente les résultats de l'édition 2012 du sondage aux établissements membres de l'AÉPUC. Ces résultats ont été mis en corrélation avec une version antérieure du même sondage, soit l'édition 2009. Trois éléments importants que le lecteur doit prendre en compte ressortent de cette comparaison. En premier lieu vient l'intérêt grandissant des membres de l'AÉPUC pour la formation à distance, de même que pour les modèles et pratiques soutenus par la technologie. Un deuxième point essentiel provient de la valeur qu'accordent les membres de l'AÉPUC au réseautage entre collègues. Enfin, les établissements d'éducation permanente de partout au Canada continuent d'être valorisés pour leur capacité génératrice de recettes en périodes de conjoncture économique difficile, même si, en d'autres périodes, on peut ressentir de l'ambivalence envers l'éducation permanente.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the outcome of an online survey completed by CAUCE's institutional members in Spring 2012. The 2012 survey is the second delivery of a survey completed by the same group of stakeholders in 2009. The findings of that study are found in an article by Lorraine Carter, then chair of the CAUCE Research Committee, and Tracey Taylor O'Reilly, then CAUCE president. The article was called "CAUCE Institutional Members' Survey: A Snapshot" (Carter & O'Reilly, 2009).

CAUCE is an organization dedicated to university-based continuing and adult education in Canada and the professional development needs of its members. As an organization, CAUCE has institutional and affiliate members. While CAUCE values all its members, it is institutional members that represent the majority, and both the 2009 and 2012 surveys were completed by institutional members only.

The preface to the article by Carter and O'Reilly (2009) indicates that continuing education in Canadian universities is changing. In 2009, CAUCE members were experiencing economic restraints, structural changes, and the initial influence of online and other technology-supported approaches to learning; in 2012, these same influences exist while new ones have emerged. The impact of educational technologies on continuing education in Canada is no longer taken for granted. With the arrival of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), open educational resources, new players (including publishers and learning companies in the continuing education marketplace), and the sustained development of online and blended education formats, continuing educators need to be well-appraised of the many ways for developing and delivering superior continuing education. Fiscal pressures have never been greater and calls for reform of post-secondary education are emerging across the country.

This survey, which was released at the 2012 annual conference held in Saskatoon, was made available to deans, directors, managers, designers, and others involved in continuing education in organizations that hold institutional membership. The survey includes two sections: the first, completed by all institutional members; the second, completed only by deans and directors. In total, 657 CAUCE members were eligible to complete the survey.

The ultimate goal of the 2009 and 2012 surveys was to generate a picture of the needs and interests of CAUCE's institutional members at a specific moment in time. In the case of the 2009 survey, CAUCE used the findings to plan programs and services reflecting these needs and interests. As in the previous publication, key findings in the 2012 survey are reported here as descriptive statistics and recurring messages shared through open-ended questions and as additional comments. Where appropriate, comparisons between the two sets of findings are also provided. When numeric information is provided, it is presented in percentages.

GENERAL ORGANIZATION OF SURVEY

The survey included 35 questions available to all participants and an additional eight questions for deans and directors. The 35 questions were organized under the following headings: Respondent/ Demographic Information, CAUCE Services, Professional Development, the CAUCE Conference, and Reflecting on Continuing Education in General. While most questions used Likert scales, some open-ended questions were included. Deans and directors responded to questions about the value of CAUCE to their organizations and their staff.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A total of 111 people, representing a 16.9% response rate, completed the survey. The job category selected by the greatest percentage was program coordinator/manager/director at 57.7%. The dominant age group of participants was 50–59 years (46.9%). Of the 40% of respondents who reported between one and ten years of work experience in continuing education, 33% had between 11–20 years of experience and 27% had more than 20 years of experience. Geographically, western Canada was represented most substantively at 52.3%. Members from central Canada represented 29.7% of the respondent group while eastern Canada followed at 18.0%.

When asked about their involvement with CAUCE, participants reported the following: executive member (21.0%), committee member (21.0%), conference host (13.6%), presenter at a CAUCE conference (27.3%), and not active in a specific role (27.8%). For some respondents, these data reflect multiple involvements. Sixty-four participants reported belonging to other associations or organizations.

CAUCE MEMBER SERVICES

All responses to questions in this section were based on a five-point Likert scale: low, somewhat low, moderate, somewhat high, and high. For reporting purposes, categories have been collapsed as low, moderate, and high.

Table 1 reports the five existing CAUCE services identified as most highly valued, as well as levels of high satisfaction for these same services. In 2009, the same five services were reported as highly valued.

Table 1. Services and Opportunities Reported as High Value and High Satisfaction

Service/Opportunity (n =111)	High Value (%)	High Satisfaction (%)
Advocacy in continuing education	59.5	26.6
Awards	36.0	30.6
Conference	55.9	43.2
Deans and directors meeting	41.4	42.3
Professional development	35.1	22.5

When asked what new services participants would like if CAUCE could offer them, the participants identified the following as their top three: a leadership development program, attracting and brokering new continuing education business opportunities, and mentorship. In 2009, a leadership development program, attracting and brokering new continuing education business opportunities, and a continuing education 101 course were the leading choices.

Participants commented on a number of other services that would benefit their work. Many expressed interest in online asynchronous learning materials and self-guided resources. Other respondents suggested they would value work-focused webcasts, webinars, and live classroom learning opportunities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In this next section, participants were asked the following question: How does your institution support your professional development? Top responses were reimbursement of direct expenses for professional development, provision of time off for professional development, and in-house training and professional development sessions. The barriers of greatest impact to participating in professional development were lack of time and cost. These findings are in line with the 2009 findings.

In a comment box pertaining to facilitation of and barriers to professional development, participants spoke about heavy workloads, lack of time to participate in conferences, fiscal and human resource restraints, and competition with other conferences. Other respondents commented on the need for professional development activities to be directly relevant to practice.

The top professional development topics identified as helpful at work were leadership development and program development; program evaluation and assessment strategies tied with distance education. In 2009, the leading topic preferences were leadership development, marketing strategies, and program development.

The three preferred formats for professional development were webinars, conferences, and half-day pre-conference workshops/sessions. In 2009, the preferred formats, in order, were conferences, webinars, and teleconferences.

CAUCE CONFERENCE

When asked about attending at a CAUCE conference in the last three years, 64.0% reported attending; this percentage was strikingly similar to the 2009 value of 65.5%. In the case of the 2012 survey, the location where the greatest percentage had attended a CAUCE conference was Saskatoon (44.4%) followed by Toronto (33.1%), and Fredericton (22.6%).

Given their attendance at a recent conference, participants identified the following as providing the greatest benefits of conference attendance: professional development, networking with other colleagues, and marketing. Online/distance education information emerged as the most significant professional development benefit. Professional development and networking were, by a large margin, perceived to be the greatest benefits. Faculty development, ethics in continuing education, and research were rated as low value. The findings in both areas—greatest and least value—were the same in 2009.

Respondents identified several items of high importance in influencing conference attendance: institutional support to attend and the content of concurrent sessions and workshops; work schedule that permits attendance and personal schedule that permits attendance were the items of most importance, with work and personal schedules tied. Location of the conference within driving distance of the respondent's home institution was of low importance.

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN GENERAL

Respondents in this section of the survey were invited to reflect on continuing education at their home universities. In response to the open-ended question, "Is continuing education generally valued at your organization?" participants shared different views. Some respondents reported it is strongly valued, "[Y]es, our unit is strongly endorsed by the Provost's Office"; others were clear it is not valued, "[I]t's the first place being cut when possible!" and "Not to the extent it should be. It's almost like an afterthought ... Generally there's a lack of awareness of what CE is, does,

and its value to the university in general." Additionally, those who felt continuing education is valued often tied this value to the unit's capacity to generate funds; there were several references to the continuing education unit being valued for revenues and not for its learning mandate.

Although the opinions of respondents about how continuing education is valued within their organizations varied, 81.1% of respondents reported that they anticipated continuing education would become more important within their universities over the next three years, citing the following reasons for this shift in attitude: the revenue-generation potential of most continuing education units, the declining enrolments in traditional programs, and the offering of programs and courses that fit the needs of today's adult learner/worker. These same sentiments were expressed in 2009. What is different from the 2009 views is strength of the opinion of the 2012 respondents that continuing education would be increasingly valued. In 2009, only 68.8% expressed the same opinion.

DEANS AND DIRECTORS

As suggested earlier, the survey included one section for deans and directors of continuing education units. This section included two questions related to the concept of value and five focused questions. Out of 49 potential respondents, 40 completed this part of the survey for a response rate of 81.6%.

Asked what they value most about institutional membership, the deans and directors noted the following: networking, the deans and directors meeting, professional development opportunities, the conference, and specific services and benefits including the journal (*CJUCE*) and the listserv. When asked whether or not they felt that their units were getting sufficient value for the cost of the institutional membership, 80.0% indicated yes. The cost of the membership was further described as modest given the return benefits, most notably, networking.

The more specific questions pertained to the conference and professional development. Several changes were recommended so that the conference might better meet the needs of staff. These changes included targeted professional development opportunities, technological delivery of select sessions for those unable to attend the conference, keynote speakers with direct experience in continuing education, pre-conference sessions, increased attention to the award programs, early sharing of the conference program, a stream for administrative assistants, research-based sessions, organized networking sessions to assist participants in finding others who work in the same areas (e.g., instructional design, program planning, administration), and lower conference fees.

The deans and directors identified the following as their own professional development needs: a repository of expertise (best practices) across many functional areas; education on financial management and strategies for cost-recovery models; mentorship in a leadership role, in effecting organizational change, and in empowerment strategies; and better understanding of opportunities for advocacy at provincial and national levels.

The deans and directors identified webinars and conferences as preferred formats for professional development for staff. These choices were the same top choices in the 2009 survey.

Table 2: Preferred Formats for Professional Development for Staff

Answer Options (n=131*)	Response (%)
Webinars (web-based workshops/sessions)	27.9
Conferences that offer a mix of professional development, plenary speakers, best practices, and networking	22.1
Half-day pre-conference sessions	13.9
Web casts	12.3
Electronic bulletin boards/discussion forums	9.8
Teleconference	7.5
Blogs	6.5
Other (please specify)	6.9

*n=131 because of multiple responses

Asked to identify the benefits for staff who had attended a CAUCE conference during the three years before the survey, the deans and directors identified the following as highly beneficial: networking with other colleagues, marketing information, and online/distance education information. In 2009, the deans and directors identified networking, marketing information, and professional development as highly beneficial.

Institutional support and expense of conference attendance were the factors reported as most influencing staff attendance at the conference. Tied for third were work schedule and personal schedule. Location near an airport was noted to be important while location in a town/city with a large university was reported to be of low importance.

DISCUSSION

When contextualizing the 2012 findings in relation to the 2009 findings, we acknowledge that findings based on two deliveries of a survey do not necessarily constitute a trend. However, where a change is otherwise validated by practice and/or the literature, it will be pointed out for consideration.

The total number of respondents in 2012 (n=111) was comparable to the number of participants in 2009 (n=117). However, with a response rate of only 16%, there is clear room for improvement, and CAUCE is encouraged to discover other ways of connecting with members. Because the majority of respondents (65.5%) also attended the CAUCE conferences in the previous three-year window, the opinions expressed through the survey are largely reflective of members who are already actively engaged with the organization.

The demographic profiles for 2009 and 2012 are similar although a greater percentage of respondents reported their age between 50 and 59 in 2012. While not necessarily problematic, this circumstance is a sign that succession planning is more important than ever. The higher rate of participation by members in western Canada is understandable since the survey was launched in Saskatoon. The same situation occurred in 2009 when the survey was launched in Vancouver. Something that may be of interest is a decrease of 8% in respondents from central Canada from 2009 to 2012. Because of the number of universities in Central Canada that are CAUCE members, this decline merits investigation.

Although there are still many CAUCE members who are not actively involved in the life of the organization (47.6%), there does appear to be greater involvement by the 2012 respondents (52.4%) than by 2009 respondents (27.8%). At the same time, since the strength of CAUCE relies on the commitment of engaged volunteers, hearing from those who did not complete the survey and who may or may not be otherwise involved with CAUCE is important. Learning about the needs and involvements of these members will assist CAUCE in making informed decisions about supports, services, and new directions. As well, if the non-respondents are also non-participating members, there is a risk that those who are presently involved in CAUCE will, in time, start to curtail their involvements due to insufficient time and competing demands.

Because advocacy was again identified as highly valued, it appears that continuing education units continue to be challenged to position themselves within their institutions and the larger community of continuing education in Canada. Alternately, there is clear expression over time of the value of the networking and professional development facilitated through face-to-face and webinar-facilitated gatherings. Although these services are highly valued, levels of satisfaction are not as high as they might be, ranging from 22.5 % for professional development to 43.5% for the conference. Interviews and/or focus groups with members will assist in identifying areas for improvement.

New services selected from a proposed list were, in two cases, the same in 2009 and 2012: a leadership program and assistance with brokering new continuing education business opportunities. An emerging point of difference was the 2012 expression of interest in mentoring, which contrasts with requests for a continuing education 101 course in 2009. Notably, since the 2009 survey, CAUCE has done considerable work in developing and delivering sessions on the practice of continuing education in Canada. Because of this work, members may now be looking for more focused mentorship as a next step.

In the open-ended question about new services and resources, members mentioned freely accessed web-based resources and sessions that could be accessed at a distance. This emphasis on resources and supports made available through technology-enabled means emerged at different points in the survey. It is possible that as continuing education professionals now use more technology in the services, courses, and programs they deliver, they see the value in using these same means to meet their own professional needs. The costs of face-to-face professional development also needs to be noted.

Just as the conference remains something CAUCE members value, the barriers to attendance have remained constant between 2009 and 2012. Most significant is cost. With the budgetary restraints occurring in universities across Canada at the time of this report, the fee to attend, coupled with travel and accommodation costs, will continue to be an impediment. Recognizing the benefits of networking that CAUCE members value so highly through conference attendance, CAUCE may wish to explore alternate networking opportunities such as communities of practice and special interest groups made accessible through webinar technologies. Web streaming of select conference sessions may also be an option. Based on members' declared interest in distance learning, including online and blended models, opportunities to use these technologies for networking are valuable from a practice point of view. As a way of bolstering conference attendance, consideration of different fee structures is recommended.

The same messages emerged in the professional development findings for both 2009 and 2012: institutions are experiencing financial restraint and this circumstance, along with workload issues, is impeding members' ability to attend face-to-face professional development workshops such as the pre-conference sessions. Easy to access, short, timely, and cost effective solutions are recommended. In some instances, a webinar might be appropriate; in others, there may be value in repositories of materials and practices that can be accessed on demand. While the professional

development topics (leadership and program development) rated first and second in 2012 and in 2009, there was a change in the topic ranked third: program evaluation/assessment and distance education tied for third in 2012, displacing marketing in 2009. Marketing, however, continues to remain important to respondents in 2012 as it fell by only one position (from third to fourth); by comparison, distance education moved from seventh to third place in 2012. In a related finding, respondents identified the CAUCE conference as the most preferred format for professional development; in 2012, this spot was held by webinars. The deans likewise identified webinars as the preferred means of facilitating professional development for staff.

The deans and directors continue to value the face-to-face networking opportunities offered by the deans and directors meeting and the CAUCE conference. Because of the nature of their work, these senior administrators regard such gatherings to be vital for community building, strategy and policy work, and general sharing of trends and opportunities found across the country.

In summary, the recurring messages across this study fall into three main categories. First, the responses to several questions in the survey revealed the members' need to better understand distance education models and practices. The days of distance education and continuing education being separate and discrete enterprises are past (Carter & Graham, 2012). In order to compete in an age when online courses are the standard and MOOCs present a unique possibility for negatively affecting the non-credit continuing education market, continuing educators are required to learn more about and do more through the judicious use of educational technologies. These technologies are also important cost-effective ways for responding to the professional development needs of continuing educators.

The second key message ties to the tremendous value that CAUCE members place on networking and their colleagues. Through creative approaches involving new and different face-to-face and technology-supported interactions, CAUCE must remain true to its commitment to connect the professionals who work in the fields of university continuing and adult education. It is clear that networking and relationships are characteristics of CAUCE's strong past (McLean & Carter, 2013) and exciting future.

Last is the double-edged sword of dollars and cents. While operational budgets within continuing education units are not, in many instances, sufficient to support staff attendance at the conference, members express strong interest in attending the conference. If conference fees and pre-conference fees could be reduced, the gains could include increased attendance at the conference and achieve the networking that members desire. Alternately, there may be ways whereby CAUCE could collaborate with other organizations in conference work and, in return, reduce the competition among different organizations for the limited resources available to attend conferences.

From a bigger picture point of view, while some continuing educators and administrators may feel negatively about continuing education units being valued for their revenue-generating capacity, in fiscally difficult times, it is better to be part of the solution than a contributor to the problem. The challenge of being competitive and solution oriented, while not new to CAUCE members, may also mean a need for increasing knowledge of who the competitors are and how to use new technologies in continuing education. Additionally, the partnership opportunities for CAUCE members should not be underestimated. Effective partnerships may very well be the face and future of continuing and adult education in Canada in ways yet to be revealed.

FINAL THOUGHTS: WHAT'S NEXT?

As for next steps, the CAUCE executive and committees will use the findings of this study for planning purposes, although focused conversations with engaged and less engaged members are highly recommended before implementation of new services and programs. To enhance CAUCE's capacity to address some of the needs identified by members, CAUCE may need to reach out to other associations and individual members with expertise in specialized areas.

Finally, CAUCE members need to become actively involved in their professional organization. In some cases, a general appeal may bring members to take on new roles; in other cases, a direct appeal by the executive and committee chairs may bring younger and newer members into the CAUCE family and leadership positions. Because of the complexities of contemporary continuing education in uncertain times, whatever efficiencies CAUCE can bring to supporting its members, such as transparent channels of communication and varied forms of networking, are important.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Lorraine Carter is the Academic Director of the Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario. Lorraine has acted as the Chair of the CAUCE Research and Information Committee as well as representing central Canada on the CAUCE Board of Directors.

Lorraine Carter est directrice universitaire du Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning (CFTL) de l'Université Nipissing de North Bay, en Ontario. Auparavant, elle était la présidente du comité Recherche et information de l'AEPU, en plus de représenter le Centre du Canada au conseil d'administration de cette association.

Behdin Nowrouzi is a doctoral student in Laurentian University's interdisciplinary PhD in rural and northern health. While Behdin's research interests are extensive, it is his work in organizational and institutional well-being and change that is relevant to this study.

Behdin Nowrouzi est étudiant de troisième cycle au doctorat interdisciplinaire en santé dans les milieux ruraux et du nord, de l'Université Laurentienne. Bien que les sujets de ses recherches soient très variés, ce sont ses travaux sur le bien-être et le changement organisationnels et institutionnels qui sont pertinents pour la présente étude.