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Winter 1979

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Nyre, Glenn F., "Conference Demographics and Evaluation Summary" (1979). *POD Quarterly: The Journal of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education*. 101.
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Conference Demographics and Evaluation Summary*

GLENN F. NYRE

Demographic Overview

Thirty-four states, the District of Columbia and Canada were represented at POD's Fifth Annual Conference at Fairfield Glade, Tennessee. This introductory sentence should sound vaguely familiar to many of the *Quarterly's* readers, since it is numerically the same as last year's opening summary report statement. Tennessee and Canada, with 13 participants each, wrested top honors from last year's winner, Texas, which fell from 16 to 9 participants. Other double-digit states were Ohio and Virginia, with 11 each, and California and Illinois, with 10 each.

The largest reductions in participation were from Louisiana, which fell from eight people last year to none this year, and Colorado, which also had none this year but six last year. States which have never been represented at our conferences are Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon and Wyoming. Six of these nine states are located in POD's western region. Furthermore, of the thirteen states in the Western region, only two (California and Washington) were represented at this year's conference. This clearly supports the wisdom of holding next year's conference in the West.

The North Central region held on to its 35% representation between this year and last, and in the process was again the region

* Space considerations dictate the inclusion of this abridged version of the 1979 Conference Evaluation Report in the *Quarterly*. This does not mean, however, that POD is departing from its inclusionary policy. For your very own copy of the complete, unexpurgated, twenty-four-page (single-spaced) report, including seventeen tables and eleven displays, send me a check for \$2.50 to cover photocopying and mailing expenses. Checks should be made payable to the Evaluation and Training Institute.

responsible for the highest percentage of people, although the Southern region moved within two people and one percentage point of sharing that honor, increasing from 28% last year to 34% this year. The Northeast (21% last year and 16% this year) and the West (12% last year and 7% this year) both decreased in participation, while Canada showed an increase from 4% to 8%. If our Canadian cohorts continue to grow in representation, I promise to begin listing them by province instead of presenting them as a generalizable lump.

As in prior years, almost half of the participants (45%) were attending their first conference. This year it may be partly attributable to the fact that center and program directors fell from their two-year standard of 37% to only 30% representation, while professional development staff members increased from 8% to 25% between the last two years. Some program directors seem to have chosen not to attend this year and to instead award their travel money to staff members. With San Francisco as next year's conference site, it would be worth taking bets that these percentages turn around again. For the same reason, I also predict that the category of administrators, which fell from 22% to 10% this year will also edge back up next year. Faculty members have remained more stable than most of their jobs, accounting for one-fourth of the attendees at the last three conferences.

A series of analyses dealt with the participants' institutional type and the faculty and student body sizes of those institutions. Generally, these analyses indicated that we are drawing more people from larger schools in the public sector than previously. Representatives from public, doctoral-granting universities showed the greatest percentage increase between this year and last (from 17% to 30%), and if one included the public professional schools in that category (as perhaps they should be, but we have singled them out statistically as a separate target population), the increase would be even larger—from 21% to 39%. Meanwhile, public *non*-doctoral-granting institution participants demonstrated the largest decrease—to 13% from 27% last year. As might be expected, size factors corresponded to these findings.

Evaluation Overview

The Evaluation Committee of 200 (which was really composed of 170 people, since attendance was down from last year's 208

registrants), armed with clipboards and multicolored dots for participant reinforcement and identification, interviewed 155 of the participants (91%) on Monday and Tuesday in a "chain interview" strategy. In addition, 127 people (75%) also filled out a two-page end-of-conference evaluation form.

Both techniques proved very useful. The interviews served two major purposes: 1) they fostered communication among the participants and allowed them to rejoice together over certain areas and to commiserate with each other over others; and 2) it allowed for feedback on particularly worthwhile sessions and identified what types of information and skills the participants were responding to in terms of usefulness "at home" as the conference progressed. The end-of-conference evaluation form was used to obtain most of the demographic information on the participants and to give a summative overview of the conference, general activities and types of sessions. For those of you who were at the conference and have been eagerly awaiting the "dot competition" results, they broke down as follows:

<i>Color</i>	<i>N</i>
Green	35
Dark Blue	22
Yellow	21
Orange	20
Black	17
Light Blue	16
Tan	15
Red	9
	<hr/> 155

Interview Results

Considering the type of organization POD is, it should come as no surprise that 121 of the participants mentioned learning new ideas and identifying new strategies and skills as their primary objectives in coming to the conference. Meeting new and old friends was second, with 29; rest, relaxation and renewal combined for third, with 18; to find out what professional development is all about was next, with 8; to learn more about faculty evaluation followed with 7; and no other objective was mentioned by more than one person.

While only 60 of the 155 people interviewed (39%) thought

that something was being overemphasized at the conference, with “touchy-feely” and “show and tell” (your words, not mine) far outdistancing the competition, they were much more willing to talk about what was underemphasized. To the latter question, 137 of them (88%) had many suggestions. Most prominent among them were research and theory (38 people); more advanced/rigorous sessions (19); organizational development and change (16); instructional development (14); evaluation of programs (12); and administrative concerns (11).

The interviewees were also asked to name “great” and “not so great” sessions. Although I decline to put these in print for posterity in the *Quarterly* (you will have to pay for this information), I will note that many of the sessions were listed in both categories. In fact, only two of the sessions mentioned as “not so great” were not also listed among the “greats.” Only nine “greats” came out unscathed—generally, all of them with more fans to begin with than the others. Generalizing a bit further, it seems as though the higher-rated sessions provided something practical to their audiences and/or took on a workshop-type atmosphere. Those receiving mixed reviews tended to be more opinion-laden types of sessions which are more likely to present information with which one can more easily agree or disagree.

Almost everybody had at least “one thing to say to the evaluation committee,” as the final interview question requested. In fact, 305 comments were forthcoming, representing 1.97 responses per interviewee. We are not a group short on opinions.

Far outdistancing the other comments was the suggestion that POD move its conference to a city, airport, or at least a more accessible location, followed by kudos for Earle Bowen’s chairmanship and the conference in general, requests to emphasize theory and research more while reducing “show and tell” sessions, developing “tracks” for participants, and scheduling the conference over a weekend.

Evaluation Form Results

Facilities, quality of program, scope of program and location all received somewhat lower ratings this year than previously. The responsibility for this seems to rest mainly with the management of the facility (not our first choice), the presenters themselves (you?),

the conference planning committee's decision to not have invited sessions, and possibly the fact that more Core Committee members gave sessions this year than last.

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which the various *types* of sessions (and the display area) contributed to meeting their conference objectives. Unfortunately, the only category among workshops, panels, formal sessions, special sessions, demonstration programs and displays that they were able to clearly differentiate from the others was the display area, which received a mixed reaction.

The conference attendees found the most satisfying aspect of the conference to be meeting new and old friends. Only *six* people did *not* include this response among the two they were asked to give in this regard. Following these 121 responses, there was a large drop to the other categories: Holistic sessions (15 people); informality (12) and beauty and remoteness of the site (10).

The primary "least satisfying" aspects of the conference mentioned by participants were ground transportation (78), food (66), lack of rigorous sessions (27), lack of new information (21) and pre-conference communications (20). The comments and recommendations written in at the end of the form generally followed these same lines, with some of the information obtained through the interviews also being re-affirmed, including the "tracking" idea, more opportunities for mixing informally and less overlapping time slots.

POD's Response

The complete evaluation report was circulated to the 1980 Conference Planning Committee in advance of their initial planning meeting on November 18, and all concerns which could be reasonably addressed were taken into account. The most noticeable changes which will take place next year in response to this year's evaluation results are as follows: The conference will be held at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley, a location which will require no prescribed ground transportation and a site which offers ample "congregating" space; it will be held inclusive of a weekend; there will be fewer organized meals; there will be a clear theme throughout the program; there will be some invited sessions to assure continuity of the theme; there will be at least three "tracks" for participants; there

will be more of an opportunity for “mixing” during the first evening and several additional opportunities to do so informally throughout; case studies or “show and tell” will be reduced and research and theory sessions will be correspondingly increased; overlapping time slots will be eliminated; types of sessions will be more clearly differentiated and defined; and the displays will be more interactive in nature. Other than those eleven changes, everything will remain the same—if there is anything left.

I am pleased with the response of the planning committee to your many comments, but am even more pleased with your responses to my evaluation endeavors. I would like to thank all of you who took the time during the conference to participate in the interviewing process and to complete the evaluation form. An extremely high standard of involvement in POD’s evaluation procedures has been established over the years, and I can assure you that with the many changes which will be made in next year’s conference, your continuing assistance will perhaps be even more crucial.