

1999

The 1998 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association

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Conference Highlights

The 1998 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association

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From October 14th through the 17th of this year members of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) gathered at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza in Chicago, Illinois for MWERA-98, our annual conference. Over 325 people registered for this four day meeting, attending and presenting at a variety of sessions including papers, symposia, roundtable discussion/posters, invited speakers, meetings and socials. MWERA-98 represented the culmination of over a year of hard work by a number of people. First, though, lets review the conference.

MWERA-98 began on Wednesday afternoon (the 14th) with a number of people attending pre-conference workshops. This year several additional workshops were also held Thursday through Saturday, giving attendees the opportunity to participate in more than one interesting event. Initial feedback from this scheduling was positive, and suggests that members might want a greater variety of in-depth experiences held throughout future conferences (something that will be looked into for the 1999 annual meeting).

Ed Hines, University Distinguished Professor from Illinois State University, kicked-off the meeting with a Wednesday evening address titled "Policy Research in Higher Education: Data, Decision, & Dilemmas". Ed's talk presented information on the changing nature of policy development and funding over the past several decades for state-supported institutions of higher education. His insights

into what might come in the next few years evoked interesting discussion among session attendees, and gave everyone food for thought for the next few days.

Thursday morning began bright and early at 8:00 am with the first paper presentation sessions. Then, at 9:30 am, Bob Albrecht, the Chief Academic Officer from Western Governors University, presented an address titled "Western Governors University: New Challenges, New Technologies, New University". This presentation described the nature and mission of WGU, its support being received from numerous states and companies, and its relationship with traditional institutions of higher education. Talking with many session attendees after the talk revealed that folks did not know a lot about WGU, with many thinking it was another University of Phoenix (known for its distance education initiatives). The actual mission of WGU, addressing competency evaluation and assessment together with cooperative agreements with other institutions, raised folks understanding in and interest about this new model of higher education delivery.

The day continued with additional paper sessions, symposia, and workshops. This year division meetings were held throughout the day on both Thursday and Friday, with the result being a reported increase in meeting attendance and division interest across all divisions! Thursday afternoon saw everyone in the Sauganash Ballroom East for 50 minutes of roundtables/posters. Participants were able to move from

table to table, meeting and discussing with presenters from a variety of different topics. The number of table-top posters were a big hit, providing another way for presenters to convey their work. Also new this year were a number of table dedicated to "Hot Topics" discussions. Rather than presenting a formal research paper, these presenters engaged participants in a lively discussion concerning many of the hottest issues facing educators today. Special thanks to Tom Parish, then MWERA President-Elect, for suggesting and organizing these innovative presentations. Thursday concluded with the traditional Cracker Barrel social!

In addition to continued presentations, Friday brought attendees a catered luncheon with an invited address by Judith Gappa, Professor of Educational Administration from Purdue University. Following an excellent meal, Judy presented information about the changing nature of the higher education professoriate. Her talk highlighted issues that are affecting many of the MWERA membership: increasing numbers of non-tenure appointments, changing work loads and expectations, and pressures for modifications to the traditionally held values of academic freedom and tenure. The follow-up session provided attendees the opportunity to examine these issues in greater depth. Another roundtable discussion/poster session highlighted Friday afternoon's activities, along with additional paper sessions and division meetings. That evening MWERA President, Kim Metcalf, hosted the President's Reception, where everyone talked and relaxed to good food, drink, and music.

The final day of the conference, Saturday, saw additional paper presentations and workshops. The highlight, however, was the Presidential Address given by MWERA

President, Kim Metcalf, Associate Professor from Indiana University. Kim's talk addressed his work on the use of private tuition vouchers, a movement gaining in popularity across the United States. Early results from his evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program has produced interesting data on the usefulness of vouchers, and sparked a lively interest and follow-up questions from the packed room of attendees! The conference officially ended at Noon following the last sessions.

Overall, the conference was a great success. Attendance was up, and both presenters and attendees reported generally good experiences throughout the meeting (full feedback details are being compiled by Member-at-Large Mary Ann Wham). I want to again thank all of the Division Senior and Junior Chairs who worked so hard coordinating the submissions, review, and session organization for their respective divisions. Sharon McNeely, Thomas Parish, and Jean Pierce deserve special praise for their extra efforts on various parts of the program, insuring that everything came together just the way it was supposed to. Deb Bainer, Richard Smith, and Gene Kramer, the co-editors of the *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, deserve special thanks for all their assistance and extra efforts in promoting the meeting, and making sure that the inserts and journal looked fantastic! Finally, student volunteers from both Illinois State University and Northeastern Illinois University staffed the registration table, and made sure that the sessions rooms were all well staffed throughout the conference. Preparing for MWERA-98 took an enormous amount of personal time and effort; however, it was time and effort that paid off handsomely. I am looking forward to next year's conference already!