

VIEWPOINT

Disruptive Innovations Addressing Quality, Access, and Cost Alternatives for Faculty Development

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Years ago we would never have envisioned that faculty development could be obtained other than by attending national conferences. Some of us would attend as many as 5 national conferences a year where we would make professional presentations. We would leave these conferences energized with new ideas and contacts for future collaborations. Traditional attendance at national conferences has been an opportunity for faculty members to become informed about development in their fields from leading experts. It also is an opportunity to network with others with similar interests. Attendance at these conferences is the culture of academia and provides the ability to advance in academic rank, to become nationally visible, and to provide opportunities to serve one's profession. The opportunity to get away from distractions at one's institution also is an advantage of traveling to conferences. However, with access to e-mail via mobile devices, this may no longer be an advantage. A disadvantage of being away from the office is that it puts us further behind in work obligations. We spend several days catching up upon our return even if we are in constant communication via e-mail.

With declining resources and rising costs for attending national conferences, there is a need to develop disruptive innovations that target new audiences and new services addressing issues of quality, access, and cost for faculty development. Trends and lessons learned with e-learning in higher education as means to pursue a degree could be applied to faculty development. Quality needs to be high if faculty members are to embrace these innovations, and lack of quality may be a contributing factor to faculty members being slow to adopt alternative formats to traditional conferences. Presentations should include nationally recognized experts. Promotion and tenure committees would be more willing to accept these faculty development efforts if high quality standards are maintained. As it is, such committees may be skeptical of the quality of such efforts in view of expanding predatory publishers and fraudulent conferences.¹

With current technological advances, it is now possible to obtain faculty development without ever leaving our offices, thus addressing the issue of access. The major pharmacy organizations such as American Association

of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP), American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) have implemented some alternatives. These include more frequent webinar and live-streaming conference presentations, which are often recorded. However, this format limits interactions between speaker and participants and among participants. Opportunities for virtual poster presentations are available to some extent, (eg, the ACCP for students and residents²). The biggest challenge is how to address the networking advantage that face-to-face conferences offer. Focused and moderated Twitter chats—where a period of time is set aside for dialogue on a topic and a hashtag is assigned and collects all the tweets within that time period—are feasible.³ However, these chats are public. Other approaches to engage the academy in virtual collaborative dialogue, such as virtual chat rooms, is needed.

The costs of attending conferences continue to increase when factoring the high registration fees and the costs of hotels and airfares. With declining state support for higher education and declining budgets among schools of pharmacy, the academy needs to develop a new vision for the culture of faculty development. Mainstream pharmacy professional organizations may be slower to accept alternative formats for conferences. Part of this is related to the revenues generated by hosting national conferences.

We believe that organizations such as AACP should change their way of doing business in terms of conferencing. They should explore setting up virtual conferences that mimic the program experienced at a face-to-face conference. Over the past few years, the EDUCAUSE annual conference has created a virtual conference.⁴ This allows people to participate in many of the conference offerings from their home institution without traveling to the event.

Virtual conferencing would allow more faculty members to participate, which could increase the number for programing and increase revenues for the sponsoring organization. The Online Learning Consortium (formerly SLOAN Consortium) provides many resources to

enhance online learning.⁵ Moreover, companies such as Communique Conferencing Inc. provide tools for creating a virtual conference.⁶ Using 3-D technology, they can create an exhibit hall, auditorium with on-demand web-cast presentations, a lounge or communication center for networking including scheduled discussion, discussion forum, and group chat and messaging.⁷ The presentations can be provided on demand as the recordings are archived.

The advantages of expanding alternatives to face-to-face conferences are potential budget savings for faculty members. We encourage AACP to develop a revolutionary perspective on alternative quality conferencing opportunities at reasonable costs as a key mission. This approach may attract new audiences who do not participate in faculty development programming.

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