
SPREADING THE WORD:

G. William Hill, IV, Chair
Department of Psychology,
Kennesaw State College

Joseph Palladino, Chair
Department of Psychology,
University of Southern Indiana

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The rising costs of national conferences in the academic disciplines prevent many faculty members from attending these conferences. Because of their size, these conferences can only be held in some of the larger and more expensive cities. Their large size also tends to contribute to impersonal encounters where a faculty member easily becomes lost. Therefore, opportunities for the type of networking that many faculty cover are either lost or greatly reduced. In addition, many national conferences tend to place a great deal of emphasis on the presentation of research rather than issues directly related to teaching. Although the importance of research activities is not in question here, such an emphasis sometimes comes to the detriment of teaching interests.

One solution to cost and program problems inherent in a large national conference is the development of regional conferences for faculty in a particular discipline that may adopt a narrower focus both in terms of topics and number of participants. The success of the Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology, a two-day conference sponsored jointly by the Department of Psychology and the Office of Continuing Education at the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville, is ample testimony to the potential for such conferences. This conference, entering its sixth year, annually attracts 80 to 100 participants. The success of the Mid-America Con-

ference directly led to the development of the Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology, sponsored by the Department of Psychology and the Office of Continuing Education at Kennesaw State College. In its first year, the Southeastern Conference drew almost 80 people from 8 states. Planning for the second Southeastern Conference is already under way and a number of last year's participants have contacted the college to inquire as to the dates of the 1990 conference.

The basic format of these conferences is a two-day meeting beginning late Friday morning and ending after lunch on Saturday. The conferences include two or three featured speakers and a number of one-hour concurrent sessions on a variety of topics related to teaching. The featured speakers are well-known figures in the teaching of psychology (e.g., textbook writers, American Psychological Association Distinguished Teacher recipients). Concurrent sessions have presented teaching approaches and techniques for a specific type of course found in the curriculum, developing an undergraduate research program, academic advisement, incorporating computers into the curriculum, writing across the psychology curriculum and developing a senior honors seminar. Presenters for the concurrent sessions may be directly recruited by the conference coordinator or a call for programs may be sent out to prospective participants. The Southeastern Conference used a call for programs and received many more proposals than could be accepted.

Both the Southeastern Conference and the Mid-America Conference have been designed to minimize expenses while providing an attractive program for those interested in development of their teaching skills. These conferences are held on campus to minimize the cost of meeting rooms and the high cost of providing meals and breaks dur-

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ing the conference at hotels. The cost has been held to \$85 per participant, which includes all breaks, two lunches, a breakfast, a dinner and a cocktail hour. Some of the costs may be reduced by encouraging various publishing companies to make donations to the conference in return for publicizing their contribution. Although conference facilities on the Kennesaw campus are limited, a little creativity and hard work by the Office of Continuing Education enabled us to hold all of our sessions in the Library. The presentations given by the featured speakers were held in Library 470, as were all breaks; and concurrent sessions were scheduled in various conference rooms and classrooms in the Library. This enabled the conference to be centrally located on campus, and minimized the amount of traveling from session to session. The drawback to having the entire conference on campus, however, is that some arrangement for shuttling the participants between the hotel and campus must be made for participants who flew to the conference.

If your department wishes to run a conference of this nature, the major task of the department conference coordinator will be to recruit speakers for the program. We have not found this to be difficult. In fact, after the first year, people begin to call, offering to do various sessions. We have generally paid an honorarium to the featured speakers sufficient to cover their expenses plus a little extra for them. Speakers doing a concurrent session have their conference registration fee waived, and if speakers are doing more than one session, they will also have their hotel expenses waived. All other arrangements and details are efficiently handled by the personnel in Continuing Education (e.g., breaks, meals, printing and mailing conference materials, shuttle arrangements between the hotel and campus). The conference fee

is more than sufficient to cover all costs for the conference, and even make a profit.

The participant evaluations for both the Mid-American and Southeastern Conferences are overwhelmingly positive. Participants not only commend the quality of the program itself, but also the facilities and accommodations. The participants also often note that they found the opportunity to meet and talk with others interested in teaching particularly rewarding. Success is clearly demonstrated by the continuing growth in the number of participants and the fact that many participants return to the conference each year.

With shrinking faculty travel budgets, escalating travel costs, and a growing concern for the effectiveness of teaching, it seems that low-cost regional conferences have much to recommend them. Many institutions, including Kennesaw, have the facilities (and perhaps the willingness) to organize such conferences. These conferences have a positive impact upon the departmental faculty sponsoring the conference as well as the institution itself and its reputation. In addition to the Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology, the Department of Nursing at Kennesaw recently sponsored a successful teaching conference. The success of these conferences clearly demonstrates that the faculty and Office of Continuing Education at Kennesaw have the capability to coordinate and sponsor conferences of this nature. If your department is interested in developing a conference, assistance can be obtained from the Office of Continuing Education and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). In addition, you may want to consult with those members of the Kennesaw Psychology and Nursing Departments that were involved in coordinating their teaching conferences. 🍎

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