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• Professional Forum

**Eighteen Years of the Great Lakes Regional
Counseling Psychology Conference:
Revisiting the Need for Regional Conferences**

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The Great Lakes Regional Conference on Counseling Psychology is the only conference to continuously fulfill the 1987 mandate issued by Division 17 for regional counseling conferences. The rationale for regional conferences is reviewed, and the 18-year history of the Great Lakes Regional Conference is examined. The authors conclude by noting the strengths and limitations of regional conferences and recommend that the Society of Counseling Psychology reconsider the issue of regional conferences in counseling psychology.

Regional conferences tend to offer a broad scope of programs with a particular emphasis on graduate student involvement and networking with peers, the Society/Division, and its members.

—*Society of Counseling Psychology (2004, p. 157)*

The Great Lakes Regional Conference in Counseling Psychology held its 18th consecutive annual conference at Indiana University, Bloomington, in April 2005. Since Division 17, The Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP), issued the mandate for regional conferences in 1987, the Great Lakes Conference is the only regional conference to run continuously. We review the original rationale for regional conferences, provide an overview of the history of the Great Lakes Conference, discuss the strengths and challenges

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of regional conferences, and conclude with recommendations regarding the future of regional conferences in counseling psychology.

ORIGINAL CONCEPT OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES

National professional organizations have long recognized the advantage of using regional affiliates and meetings to address local, state, and regional issues and to provide a system for recruitment and representation in the national organization. For example, the American Psychological Association recognizes seven regional affiliates: the Eastern Psychological Association, the Midwestern Psychological Association, the New England Psychological Association, the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, the Southeastern Psychological Association, the Southwestern Psychological Association, and the Western Psychological Association. These regional psychological associations consist of a large membership (e.g., the Midwestern Psychological Association has more than 3,000 members), have a long history (e.g., the Eastern Psychological Association was founded in 1886), and hold regional meetings to conduct business, present and discuss research, network, and discuss important regional issues. Consequently, given the success of the regional concept within the American Psychological Association, it is not surprising that at one time the leaders of Division 17 entertained the idea of regional conferences as the size and influence of Division 17 grew.

We reviewed the history of Division 17 (through *The Counseling Psychologist*, newsletters, presidential papers, and the American Psychological Association archives and through communication with longtime members of Division 17) and learned that pinpointing when regional conferences in counseling psychology were first proposed is difficult. In informal interviews with faculty in the Great Lakes region (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio), we found that several attempts at local gatherings and conferences were precursors to formal regional conferences. For example, several faculty at the University of Notre Dame recalled that in the mid 1970s, Division 17 president John Holland asked for volunteers to host a regional conference to foster a grassroots movement to diversify the leadership and involvement in the Division (W. Bartlett, personal communication, May 4, 2004). In response to the request by Holland, the University of Notre Dame hosted a one-time regional conference in which a group of approximately 100 counseling psychologists gathered to discuss national and regional issues (S. McCabe, personal communication, May 5, 2004). At the time, the Midwest was a logical site for such a gathering given the large number of training programs in close proximity (J. Hurst, personal communication, May 20, 2004). No further

information on this conference, however, or its impact on future gatherings could be located in the Division 17 archives or through communication with now-retired faculty (e.g., Bartlett and McCabe) at the University of Notre Dame.

In 1987, Division 17 president-elect Jim Hurst identified the establishment of regional conferences in counseling psychology as his presidential project (J. Hurst, personal communication, May 20, 2004). He sent a draft of his plan to more than 75 colleagues for feedback. Hurst then sent his proposal to the Division 17 Executive Board and finally presented his idea to the Organizational and Political Issues Group during the 1987 Third National Counseling Psychology Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia (Brammer et al., 1988; Gazda, Rude, & Weissberg, 1988).

Specifically, Hurst (1987) proposed that Division 17 sponsor regional conferences to address several issues facing counseling psychology at that time. The Division 17 leadership was concerned about the inadequate number of ethnic minority professionals and students in the field and about a lack of attention to the needs of other underrepresented groups such as women and people with disabilities. Counseling psychologists were also concerned that Division 17 primarily served the interests of academic or research psychologists; this concern was realized in declining membership from counseling psychologists in applied settings. The leadership recognized that opportunities for involvement in the national leadership and direction of the Division were limited; this lack of opportunity for graduate students and new professionals was thought to be reflected in the lack of growth in membership relative to the membership growth of the American Psychological Association. Membership concerns were sharply realized in the late 1980s when the Division lost a seat on the American Psychological Association Council of Representatives because membership declined. Finally, the sheer size of the national American Psychological Association convention was perceived as a barrier to the meaningful discussion of regional and local issues.

Hurst argued that these concerns could best be addressed at a local and regional level with support from the Division. Hurst's plan called for the United States to be divided into 10 regions, with a designated conference site in each region (see Table 1). The geographical regions were delineated to incorporate as many counseling psychologists as possible in each area and to facilitate regional interaction and involvement. The regions were designed so that most counseling psychologists in a given region would have no more than a day's drive to the conference site (as opposed to the potentially lengthy travel time to any given national conference).

Hurst's plan designated that each site around the United States would identify cochairs and a steering committee. To ensure that the conferences would address the concerns stated above, Hurst stipulated that each steering

TABLE 1: 1987 Proposal for Regional Conferences, Regional Structure

<i>Region</i>	<i>States</i>	<i>1988 Conference Location</i>
Northeast	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont	Boston, MA
Atlantic Coast	Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia	State College, PA
Mid South	Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee	Gatlinburg, TN
Southeast	Alabama, Florida, Georgia	Gainesville, FL
Southwest	Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas	Houston, TX
Midwest	Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin	Urbana, IL
Great Lakes	Indiana, Michigan, Ohio	Columbus, OH
Northwest	Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota	Ames, IA
Rocky Mountain	Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming	Denver, CO
West Coast	Alaska, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington	Los Angeles, CA

NOTE: Region names were provided by James Hurst (personal communication, May 16, 2004).

committee be composed of the following: a member of an ethnic minority group, a new professional (someone who was less than 5 years postdegree), a representative from an applied setting, a graduate student, a person to focus on membership recruitment, a regional person who was recognized as having made a distinguished contribution to the profession or the Division, and a representative from each state in the region. Gender balance and the inclusion of other underrepresented populations were also selection criteria. Finally, to ensure that new people were brought into the Division leadership, all members of the steering committee, except for the distinguished professional, were to be people who had not previously held leadership in Division 17. Thus, through the design of the steering committee, the regional plan took steps to ensure representation and participation by a wide variety of professionals and graduate students who had not been involved with the Division.

The various steering committees were charged with setting the date for their conference and establishing agendas. The agendas were to reflect a balance of national, regional, and state issues. Each conference steering committee was asked (a) to assess how Division 17 could better serve conference attendees; (b) to develop action plans to involve ethnic minority members, early professionals, graduate students, and other underrepresented persons in training programs in the region; (c) to provide time at the conference for state

representatives to meet to address state issues such as licensure and third-party payments; and (d) to assess the desirability of future regional and national counseling conferences.

Regional conferences were intended to be financially self-sustaining, although limited seed money (\$500) for each regional conference could be requested from the Division 17 Executive Board. The Division 17 Executive Committee approved the regional conference plan in 1987 for implementation the following year. The regional conference plan was slated for only 1 year, but Hurst (personal communication, June 1, 2004) hoped that the success of the first conferences would lead to the regional conferences becoming recurring, self-sustaining events.

According to Hurst, all 10 regions hosted conferences in 1988 (J. Hurst, personal communication, June 1, 2004). In 1990, Hurst (personal communication, January 10, 2004) reported to the Division 17 Executive Board regarding the future of the regional and national counseling conferences. Initially, Hurst's proposal was to intersperse regional conferences with a national counseling psychology conference on an alternate-year basis. The Executive Board modified the original proposal, leaving future Executive Boards to convene national counseling conferences as needed. Although general support for the regional conferences was expressed, no further action was taken on the issue during the 1990 Executive Board meeting (J. Hurst, personal communication, June 1, 2004), and, except for the Great Lakes region, regional conferences were sporadically held (if at all).

We found no information in the SCP or American Psychological Association archives or as a result of our communications with Lyle Schmidt (SCP archivist) about the number of conferences that were held after 1988 or the reasons for the demise of the regional conferences. Consequently, we determined to gather as much information about the regional conferences as possible by contacting more than 50 current and former leaders in the counseling psychology profession (e.g., John Alcorn, David Blustein, Kathy Davis, Micki Friedlander, Jo-Ida Hansen, P. Paul Heppner, George Howard, Sharon Robinson Kurpius, Mark Leach, Frederick Leong, Jim Lichtenberg, Scott Meier, Joseph R. Morris, Joe Ponterotto, Charles Ridley, Patrick Sherry, Rex Stockton, Cal Stoltenberg, Robert Slaney, Stephanie Rude, William Wagner, Donald Zytowski). The leaders contacted were selected as a result of discussions among the authors and through recommendations provided by esteemed professionals in the field. In addition, we posted messages on the SCP and Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs listserves requesting information about the history of regional conferences, and more than 25 people responded. We also targeted each program in the Great Lakes region and spoke with faculty and alumni who were involved in each of the Great

Lakes conferences. We requested information about attendance, budget, and programs.

Unfortunately, outside of the Great Lakes region, most people had little (or in some cases no) recollection of the regional conferences. One 1988 conference attendee from the West region noted that after the initial conference no program was interested in picking up the conference and that subsequently no further conferences were held in that region (R. Goodyear, personal communication, February 6, 2005). Greg Neimeyer (personal communication, February 7, 2005) from the Southeast region reported, "I only recall two since my tenure here, which extends through all of the 80s and 90s . . . it's a lot of work. The issues of rewards and resources are always a factor, which is why we haven't held one in so long, I suppose." Similarly, a counseling psychologist from the Southwest region stated there were at least two subsequent conferences during the 1990s in that region (L. Schneider, personal communication, February 6, 2005).

Clara Hill (personal communication, February 7, 2005) from the Atlantic Coast region reported that "only one conference was held in our region, and I am not certain why the conference did not continue." Consistent with Hill's comments, Robert Slaney (personal communication, February 8, 2005) from this same region said, "I'm not sure there was any energy or mechanism for continuing the effort. I assume it simply withered through a lack of interest from the right people." In contrast to the recollections of Hill and Slaney, Edwin Herr (personal communication, February 17, 2005) from the Atlantic Coast region reported, "I do not know the precise number. I do know that Penn State offered two conferences, and for several years we would then circulate among regional conferences held by other counseling psychology programs in the region."

A counseling psychologist from the Rocky Mountain region, Ted Packard (personal communication, February 21, 2005), revealed, "I think we had some sort of brief regional meeting the year Jim Hurst was president, and then a year or two later." Donald Zytowski (personal communication, February 10, 2005) recalled that one regional conference was held in the Northwest region, while Helen Farmer (personal communication, February 8, 2005) claimed that several conferences were held in the Midwest region. Finally, Joe Ponterotto (personal communication, February 6, 2005) and Micki Friedlander (personal communication, February 7, 2005) from the Northeast region both reported not remembering if such conferences had been held in their region.

A common theme of the feedback from counseling psychologists active in the various regions was that the regional conference suffered from a lack of financial support, lack of interest, and diffusion of responsibility for the con-

ferences. These factors may have led to the demise of the regional conferences in most regions.

Hurst (personal communication, June 1, 2004) hypothesized that the regional conferences (except for Great Lakes) did not continue because the demands and financial risk of hosting a conference with little seed money from the Division were overwhelming, because presidential projects (such as the regional conferences) were often conceived only as a 1-year commitment by the Division, and because national and regional leadership did not institutionalize the conference as a shared continuing tradition. We also suspect that Hurst's inclusive yet ultimately restrictive criteria for conference committee membership, although serving the interest of involving diverse people new to the Division, may have been unrealistic and too challenging to fulfill.

THE GREAT LAKES REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The Ohio State University hosted the first Great Lakes Counseling Psychology Conference in 1988, and conferences have since been hosted each year by various institutions in the region. Table 2 lists the years and host institutions of the 19 Great Lakes conferences from 1988 to 2006. In this section we provide an overview of the history of the Great Lakes Regional Conference. However, similar to our difficulties in documenting the history of the regional conferences, our effectiveness in presenting a full picture of the scope and impact of the Great Lakes conference has been hampered by two factors. First we found that much history of the Great Lakes conference has been lost. Great Lakes programs were not archived by faculty, the Division, or the American Psychological Association. Therefore, we know who hosted the conferences in which years but could not find information that might have helped us document the impact of the conference (e.g., conference programs with the names of attendees and abstracts). Second, we found that most programs that hosted the Great Lakes conference did not assess the impact of the conference on attendees. Most hosts asked for feedback on the quality of the conference, but no material is available regarding the longitudinal impact of the conference: for example, studying the relationship between attendance at the Great Lakes conference and subsequent professional behavior (e.g., joining the SCP, assuming a leadership position in the Society, publishing in scholarly journals, and/or presenting at professional conferences). Consequently, although we believe that participation in the conference had a positive impact on organizers and attendees, we lack an empirical basis to support this belief. We also acknowledge that although only one of us has worked outside the Great Lakes region, our position as faculty (and supporters of the conference) in the region limits our objectivity.

TABLE 2: Year and Location of Great Lakes Counseling Conferences

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>
1988	The Ohio State University
1989	Ball State University
1990	University of Akron
1991	Western Michigan University
1992	Michigan State University
1993	Indiana University
1994	University of Notre Dame
1995	Kent State University
1996	Ball State University
1997	Western Michigan University
1998	Indiana University
1999	The Ohio State University
2000	Ball State University
2001	University of Akron
2002	Michigan State University
2003	Western Michigan University
2004	Ball State University
2005	Indiana University
2006	Purdue University

During the past 18 years, the Great Lakes region (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio) has been home to the following counseling psychology doctoral training programs accredited by the American Psychological Association: Ball State University, Indiana University, Indiana State University, Kent State University (now disbanded), Michigan State University (now disbanded), The Ohio State University (not currently accepting students), Purdue University, University of Akron, University of Notre Dame, and Western Michigan University. Geographically, these programs are all located within a 6-hour driving radius. In addition, several predoctoral internship sites accredited by the American Psychological Association are in the region: 12 in Indiana, 14 in Michigan, and 15 in Ohio. Therefore, the concentration of counseling psychologists in this area is large.

However, the large number and proximity of training programs in the region do not fully explain the fact that the Great Lakes conference has been the only regional conference to meet each year since 1988. Given the same constraints as other regions (e.g., time demands and financial risk), why did the Great Lakes region continue to host the conference years after other regions stopped? Hurst (personal communication, June 1, 2004) indicated that the Great Lakes region had established a tradition of occasional regional conferences (e.g., the Notre Dame conference in the mid 1970s) that might

have led to the region's counseling psychologists adopting the Great Lakes Regional Conference as a shared mission. The authors of this article have participated (as graduate students and/or faculty) in attending and hosting the Great Lakes Regional Conference for many years. In conversations among ourselves and with colleagues, including training directors, students, and alumni, we offer the following hypotheses regarding why this conference endures.

Rex Stockton, a professor at Indiana University who has attended many Great Lakes conferences over the years, described the historically strong sense of collegiality among region program faculty that he believes led the region's academic programs to adopt the Great Lakes Regional Conference as a shared mission (R. Stockton, personal communication, January 28, 2005). Joseph Morris, professor at Western Michigan University, stated that initially a core group of faculty from the region, including himself, Stockton, Naomi Meara (University of Notre Dame), and David Dixon (Ball State University), committed to support the conference, and this commitment was instilled in other faculty and students. Furthermore, some alumni anecdotally reported that their involvement in the conference as students resulted in continued participation in future Great Lakes conferences despite their having moved to different regions. It seems that for many faculty, students, and alumni, the Great Lakes conference became an important element of their training and was institutionalized as a tradition to be continued.

The Great Lakes conference became a shared mission of the region's programs, although some programs clearly took the lead in hosting it several times. For example, Ball State University has hosted the conference four times, including twice between 2000 and 2004. Indiana University and Western Michigan University have hosted the conference three times, and Michigan State, The Ohio State University, and University of Akron have each hosted twice. After the regional conference plan was introduced in 1988, a formal system was not established to determine who would host subsequent conferences, especially given the lack of direction from the Division. Eventually an informal system evolved in which academic training directors decided among themselves (e.g., at the annual conference or through e-mail) who would host the next conference. The extraordinary efforts of some training programs and individuals who felt a professional and personal responsibility to continue the conference tradition contributed to the conference's longevity.

Although Hurst originally charged the regional conferences with multiple missions, the Great Lakes Regional Conference has historically focused on socializing graduate students into the profession. As Hurst (1987) asserted, the graduate school years are key to the development of the identity of future counseling psychologists. If graduate students have a clear sense of their pro-

fessional identity extending beyond their home program and into a regional and national organization, Hurst believed that they would be more likely to join and become active members of Division 17 and the American Psychological Association. Consequently, the Great Lakes conference developed a reputation for being an affordable student-centered conference at which students could present their research and clinical interests and network with other graduate students and faculty in a less threatening (and less expensive) venue than that afforded by the national American Psychological Association conference. Some programs in the region have gone so far as to incorporate presenting at the Great Lakes conference as part of the student's doctoral training. For example, first-year doctoral students at Ball State University are encouraged to submit their fall semester doctoral seminar poster presentations to the Great Lakes conference and usually attend the conference en masse. The Ball State faculty's encouragement to attend the conference is contagious; advanced doctoral students often organize presentations with their newer peers and with master's students.

Reflecting Hurst's initial vision to broaden the appeal of the Division, graduate students have assumed major responsibilities for all aspects of organizing and hosting the conference (e.g., program review, room and meal arrangements, social activities, and/or evaluation strategies). Many alumni report that the experience of planning and implementing the regional conference is invaluable preparation for future professional interactions and leadership roles.

Finally, the Great Lakes Regional Conference has survived because of the high quality of the conference. Along with graduate students making their first conference presentations, Great Lakes conferences have attracted nationally and internationally prominent counseling psychologists as keynote speakers, including several presidents of the SCP (e.g., Rosie Bingham, Louise Douce, Nadya Fouad, P. Paul Heppner, Naomi Meara, Gerald Stone, and Derald Wing Sue). Conference themes have been responsive to national and local issues in a timely manner that is not possible with national conferences that require years of planning. Because the hosting institution commits to the Great Lakes conference usually only 1 year in advance, the program chairs can make the theme of the conference flexible and responsive to current or regional events. For example, themes of the Great Lakes conferences during the past 18 years have included counseling psychology and work, diversity, the identity of counseling psychology, health psychology, social engagement, positive psychology, the internationalization of counseling psychology, accountability in graduate training, and scientist-practitioner integration.

Although the consistent focus of the Great Lakes conference has been on graduate students, other aspects of Hurst's original plan were addressed at

different times. Efforts to include and welcome colleagues from counseling centers, private practice, and other applied settings have varied from year to year. For example, in some years the hosting academic departments worked closely with their counseling center counterparts to cohost the conference. In other years, there has been a concerted effort to provide workshops for continuing education or to otherwise promote the conference to colleagues in applied settings. Furthermore, the effort to involve a diverse (e.g., race and/or ethnicity) group of students and faculty in organizing the conference and presenting the programs has been consistent and ongoing.

The evolution of the Great Lakes Regional Conference has experienced some limitations and challenges. Financial concerns have been consistent. Owing both to a lack of external funding and a commitment to keep the conference affordable for students, programs that decide to host a Great Lakes conference traditionally begin each year with no funds and must solicit funding from their home institution or generate funds primarily from registrations. The cost of the conference is variable and primarily depends on expenses related to the travel of keynote speakers and the facilities available to the host program. For example, in 2005, Indiana University could use the school of education building at no charge, whereas in 2003, Western Michigan University had to rent suitable facilities on and off campus (with help from the university). Therefore, each institution must not only establish its own independent budget but must devise a feasible and realistic plan to raise the funds to host the conference.

Lack of startup funds and the financial risks of hosting a conference (borne only by the host institution) may have precluded some programs from volunteering to host the conference. Some programs in the region believe that their remote geographic location and lack of suitable facilities to host the conference would severely restrict attendance and represent an unacceptable financial loss and therefore have declined to host. Some programs from neighboring states outside the region have volunteered to host the conference; however, tradition has kept the Great Lakes conference within Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

Finally, the informal rotation system for site selection and lack of centralized authority have sometimes been issues when programs have lost interest in hosting or when programs learn at the last moment that they cannot host the conference. As a result, some programs have felt more responsibility for and disproportionately borne the burden for hosting the conference.

In 2005, Indiana University requested and received funding from the SCP (\$250) and because a minor profit was generated, passed that SCP funding to the 2006 host, Purdue University. In addition, the 2005 conference regional leaders secured commitments from regional programs to host the conference through 2008, which is the first time in recent memory that the hosting has

not been year-to-year. The stability and future of the Great Lakes conference seem assured for the next several years.

The 18-year history of the Great Lakes conference is testament to the dedication and commitment of the training programs in the region. We know that eight training programs have hosted Great Lakes conferences, and several prominent national and international leaders in the field of counseling psychology have been brought to the region to present their research and ideas. We also estimate that more than 1,000 students and faculty have met to present research and discuss important professional issues. Consequently, as counseling psychologists from the Great Lakes region, we recommend revisiting the idea of regional conferences for the entire profession.

REVIVING REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Many concerns that faced the Division 17 Executive Board in 1987 continue to the present day. For example, according to the minutes of the 2005-2006 Executive Board meeting, SCP President P. Paul Heppner stated that his presidential theme was “enhancing communication and connections both internally and externally, including such topics as recruiting and retaining members, promoting international collaborations, facilitating both our science and practice emphases, and mentoring new professionals and students” (Society of Counseling Psychology, 2005, p. 125). Recruitment, retention, and mentorship concerns remain a mainstay of the concerns of the SCP. Historically, Fouad, Helledy, and Metz (2003) found that SCP presidents consistently expressed concern in their presidential addresses about the exclusion from full participation in the Society by racial/ethnic minority members and practitioners and those not from traditionally dominant counseling psychology training programs. Similarly, reports from the membership chair of the SCP often cite concerns regarding declining membership (e.g., American Psychological Association, Division 17, 2003; Knox, 2004).

Counseling psychology faculty and supervisors are in the business of training counseling psychologists, the utility players of psychology, according to Murdock (2004). Trainers of counseling psychologists are justifiably proud of their profession and their students who continue in successful careers across various vocational settings. One way that students are indoctrinated into the profession of counseling psychology is through conference attendance and presentations, and the regional conference offers another relevant and focused opportunity.

Goodyear et al. (2000) described six categories that affect the ability of counseling psychologists to train students. First, practice settings for graduates have evolved from university counseling centers into managed care. Our

training has had to follow this development. Second, faculty and practitioners do not agree about the need for and speed of curricular changes. Our alumni are entering practice positions and must be trained to work with their future colleagues. Third, Goodyear and colleagues commented that the profession itself, through accreditation boards, licensure boards, and national conferences, dictates changes that must be disseminated to our student body. Fourth, social and political forces such as war, terrorism, and federal funding for training and professional services have played a role in our development. Fifth, technology has changed our training, from the existence of ever more affordable computers to the Internet to Web-based coursework. Finally, Goodyear and colleagues commented on the field's constantly evolving awareness of the cultural context both of our clients and of our trainees. All six categories are involved in our training programs, and regional conferences provide an ideal forum to address these categories in a flexible, immediate, and regionally relevant manner.

We recommend that the Society leadership consider the model of the Great Lakes conference and reinstitute regional conferences focused on graduate education, leadership development, scientist-practitioner integration, and regional issues. As such, we propose seven recommendations based on the experience of the Great Lakes conference and highlight two major challenges (the region system and SCP involvement) that are key to the success of the regional conference.

Recommendations

Regional conferences must remain focused on and directed toward students. Although graduate students have opportunities through the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students and the SCP to be involved in national issues, the regional conferences provide a manageable, flexible, and relatively low-risk venue to enter the professional arena. Students learn to juggle the myriad crises, changes, mistakes, and questions involved in creating a conference. Can a student-focused, student-created conference actually be a high-quality conference? Certainly, we reply, as long as the students have the support of their faculty. The best way to teach students how to organize a conference is to involve them in all facets, often working side by side with faculty members. Each host school handles student involvement differently, but all programs in the Great Lakes region seem to take a personal interest in helping their students succeed. The evolving reputation of the Great Lakes conference is that it is a nonthreatening place in which students can comfortably present their work, solicit feedback, and network with the region's faculty, future colleagues, and other professionals. Fouad et al. (2004)

described an efficient way to organize a conference as large as a national conference. The organizational ability required to host a conference for 2,000 attendees is daunting. Planning a conference for 200 attendees is a good apprenticeship that may lead to effective organization of larger conferences later.

Regional conferences should be affordable. A student-centered conference should be kept affordable so students can easily attend. Affordable accommodations and reasonable travel distances contribute to students' interest and ability to participate in a conference. National conferences can sometimes be prohibitively expensive for students and new professionals and also difficult to attend given work/school expectations and the lack of available time (e.g., breaks in school or vacation). With careful planning and oversight, regional conferences can maintain high standards while keeping costs low.

Regional conferences should teach students about finances and ethics. Staging a regional conference can help students understand the total costs associated with professional meetings. Skills such as budgeting, financial planning, and writing and honoring contracts may prove useful both in a national conference context and in future career endeavors (e.g., grant contracts, private practice management, and/or departmental budgets). In addition, conducting a conference in an ethically appropriate manner (e.g., ensuring a fair and equitable program review process) can bring to life issues in ethics education. Clinical practice and research often illuminate aspects of the professional lives of counseling psychologists, and we suggest that involvement in organizing a regional conference can similarly illuminate other important aspects of professional life.

Regional conferences should allow students to implement values and beliefs. With planning, regional conferences can generate a small profit; these profits can be used to benefit local charities or to help the hosting department develop seed money for a project (e.g., purchasing materials for the program's training clinic). Values such as social justice can be implemented by using profits as donations to local domestic violence shelters, cancer treatment centers, or the local American Red Cross chapter. For example, one year the hosting program organized a blood drive and a canned food drive. In addition, conference programming, exhibitors, and speakers can provide relevant information and advocacy concerning social issues. Counseling psychology expects its members to demonstrate social responsibility, and using conference profits and time to focus on social justice issues can meet this expectation.

Regional conferences must be inclusive in terms of diversity. Underrepresented groups need a safe place where they can professionally and personally network and find support. The reader may recall that one initial and enduring concern has been the marginalization of racial/ethnic minorities; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people; people with disabilities; and women in the Division leadership. Regional conferences can provide formal and informal forums for members of underrepresented groups to (a) meet and network with other members of their group and (b) meet and network with supportive people outside their group. At the Great Lakes conferences, faculty, students, and alumni often arrange formal (e.g., panels or roundtables) and informal (e.g., dinners) meetings that emphasize support for diversity. Often, regional political issues (e.g., laws regarding same-sex marriage) may require attention. In addition, programs from around a given region may have different aspects of diversity (e.g., a large, international student base) that they can highlight formally through presentations or informally through social gatherings. Regional conferences enable counseling psychologists to address issues related to diversity in the sociopolitical context in which they must live and work.

Regional conferences must reach out to practitioners. Academic departments are the logical choices to host regional counseling psychology conferences because they may have the necessary infrastructure and personnel. However, regional conferences can be charged to expand beyond academic departments to those working in applied settings. Academic departments with their networks of alumni can use the regional conference as an occasion to learn about the varied vocational settings of graduates, and this knowledge can both inform program curriculums and connect current students to professional networks.

Another advantage for the resurgence of regional SCP conferences is the opportunity for better inclusion of other counseling psychology training sites. Graduate students often complain about a relative lack of exposure to practitioners during their doctoral programs. One focus of the most recent national counseling conference that was held in Houston in 2001 (Fouad et al., 2004; McCrea, Bromley, McNally, O'Byrne, & Wade, 2004) was addressing the gap between students' academic training and their preparation for the health care arena in which many will work. A conference hosted jointly by an academic program and a local internship site can showcase potential internship candidates while providing students with a broader understanding of the applied side of the field. Another way to be more inclusive is by conducting preconference workshops or conference presentations that focus on health care issues and/or inviting practitioners to discuss the realities of managed care and treatment modalities. Given that many gradu-

ates from SCP training programs eventually become practitioners, regional conferences should seek and incorporate these graduates into the regional conferences for the benefit of all. This sort of involvement is particularly valuable for training programs in which faculty do not also practice and so are more removed from the applied perspective. Stoltenberg et al. (2000) suggested that programs using scientist-practitioner training models should direct students to present critical reviews of empirically validated treatments and of “new and controversial areas of practice-related research” (p. 637). What place will provide better opportunities for students to raise their voice than regional counseling psychology conferences?

Regional conferences should emphasize professional identity. Regional conferences can emphasize professional identity in national, regional, state, and local contexts. The regional conferences remain an ideal forum to disseminate information from the national leadership or stimulate new ideas from the membership between national conferences. For example, social justice was a theme at the 2001 Houston conference (Fouad et al., 2004) and was part of the 2000 Ball State and 2004 Great Lakes conferences. The 2001 Akron conference borrowed the idea of “difficult dialogues” used at the 2001 American Psychological Association Multicultural Summit (Bingham, Porché-Burke, James, Sue, & Vasquez, 2002). Regional counseling psychology conferences may choose themes based on the SCP presidential address from the previous year or based on some emerging public need (e.g., the controversy over gay marriage, violence in the schools and communities, or the response of counseling psychology to the effects of terrorism on the public psyche). Because of their smaller size, flexibility in programming, and regional outlook, regional conferences can be much more topical and responsive to current regional and professional identity issues than a national conference.

Challenges to the Society

To revisit the idea of regional conferences, two key issues must be addressed by the Executive Board along with the seven recommendations: (a) the region system and (b) SCP involvement in the regional conference proposal.

The region system. The 1987 regions were designed to maximize the number of programs and counseling psychologists in designated regions. However, that map has changed with program closures or suspended admissions (e.g., in the Great Lakes area, Michigan State University, Kent State University, and The Ohio State University no longer admit students) and the addition of new programs (e.g., Purdue University has recently received American Psychological Association accreditation).

We recommend that the SCP Executive Board reconsider the idea of regional conferences with a reconfigured map that encompasses the current distribution of SCP programs and members and the need for a conference within a given region. One possibility would be to create fewer and larger regions. The struggle would come in attempting to be both small enough to encourage attendance but large enough to meet the needs of SCP members. Regions that are too large (geographically or numerically) may result in a diffusion of responsibility for the conference. In this scenario, a revised Great Lakes region might include Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Pennsylvania or Minnesota would be possible additions, although having both in the same region seems unwieldy for travel (remember the original idea of limiting travel to short drives). Other regions might encompass the following areas: Southern, Southwestern, Eastern, Central, and Western. The large distances and scarcity of programs in the west would require special attention to ensure the regional concept was viable in this region.

Perhaps the Executive Board could designate regional representatives to poll members about the optimal boundaries. We are not advocating that SCP regions replicate the American Psychological Association regions; we feel that these regional groups are too large if part of the purpose is to encourage counseling psychology students to not only present but also participate in organizing the conference. Affordability is also a concern; we would not want excessive travel to raise the cost of regional counseling conference attendance such that students and faculty would have to choose between attending the regional counseling conference and the national American Psychological Association conventions.

The original regional conference plan proposed by Hurst (1987) to create a diverse and inclusive planning committee can guide regions that are reinstating conferences. Each region's needs are unique, and the regional conference idea is so flexible that the final conferences could (and should) differ significantly depending on the needs and development of programs in the regions. We advocate that regions provide general guidelines and wide latitude for the conferences rather than the somewhat restrictive guidelines of the original model that even the Great Lakes region no longer follows.

SCP involvement. Despite the fact that SCP bylaws (2004) specifically address the concept of regional conferences and mandate the existence of a Continuing Education and Regional Conference Committee, no active leadership exists in the area of regional conferences. The leadership of the Society must also decide at what level to endorse and support the concept of regional conferences. After the first year of the Great Lakes conference, the Society has not consistently contributed financially, although individual Society officers and members have supported the conference. Even though

an established conference such as Great Lakes does not depend on financial support from the Society, new conferences most likely would initially need financial support, such as seed money. The SCP bylaws provide guidance for the frequency, scheduling, coordination, legal responsibilities, and funding/profit-sharing, so the framework exists for the Division to reinvigorate the regional conference concept.

We acknowledge that for Division 17 to be able to coordinate 10 regional conferences in 1988 was an astounding logistical feat that may never be duplicated. In addition, the commitment of the \$5,000 seed money for the regional conferences in 1988 would equal a \$9,224 commitment in 2005 (assuming a 4% growth rate), a significant amount of money (that still may be an inadequate level of funding). Therefore, rather than attempt to host all regional conferences in the same year (which may sap the energy and finances of the SCP and the regions), we propose that the Society form a committee to consider new regions and investigate the need for and support of regional conferences in each region. For example, some regions may have alternative means of meeting their needs (e.g., strong participation in the American Psychological Association regional or state associations and specialized conferences such as the Winter Roundtable at Teachers College) and elect not to hold a regional conference.

Once the need for regional conferences is identified, regional conferences could be held on a rotating basis over several years. For example, using our idea of six reconfigured regions, the Society might highlight a different region each year. This rotating system might be more economical and feasible, with two added bonuses: (a) Each region's issues would be a focus for a given year, and (b) funding and support for the conferences would not depend on any one president or executive board. We assume that the Great Lakes conference would continue to be a yearly event and that other regions may develop the interest, motivation, and resources to host a yearly conference. It might be time to revisit Hurst's idea of alternating regional and national counseling conferences such that a national conference is held every 7 years (in the model proposed above) and regional conferences are held every year over a 6-year period. National counseling conferences might be a viable alternative to regional conferences; however, a national counseling conference would have to occur with greater regularity than the present as-needed model.

CONCLUSION

We hope that we have piqued the interest of more than a few of our colleagues, students, and the SCP leadership to consider revisiting and reviving

the concept of regional conferences. Some may argue that the enduring success of the Great Lakes conference is a phenomenon restricted to the region. However, we feel that the 18-year legacy of the Great Lakes Regional Conference is a potential blueprint for a regional plan to socialize students into the profession, further relevant dialogues concerning the professional identity of counseling psychologists, and help counseling psychology stay attuned to regional issues in a flexible manner. We find that many needs identified by Hurst in 1987 are still relevant, and regional conferences can be one important way to address those needs.

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