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"How was it for you?"

Two years of CPA Convention Evaluations

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Abstract

The CPA Conventions in 2001 and 2002 were held on university campuses at opposite ends of the country (Laval University, Ste-Foy, QC, and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC). In both years systematic evaluations were undertaken, in which semi-random samples of convention attendees were asked to respond on-site to surveyors. This survey technique should result in more valid data about attendees' opinions of the convention arrangements than the informal self-report technique used previously. The results of the 2001 survey showed that attendees were generally pleased with the convention, but not pleased with the site; overall, there was no clear guidance on the acceptability of university sites as compared to hotel/convention centres. This poster will compare the results of the 2002 survey to the 2001 survey, and provide recommendations to the Convention Committee about possible changes in policy or procedure that might lead to further improvements in the CPA convention experience for members and non-members alike.

Introduction and Method

In 2001, the CPA Convention committee identified a need for regular, systematic evaluations of the convention to provide information in support of convention policy and programming decisions. A sub-committee was struck for this purpose. Methods from program evaluation were identified as being relevant to this investigation. Thus far, data from 2001 and 2002 convention attendees are available, and are compared in this presentation.

In both years, a closed-ended survey instrument was completed by randomly-selected convention attendees (in English and French in 2001, in English only in 2002). The surveys were administered by student and non-student volunteers. Surveyors invited every n^{th} person (usually the 5th) who passed by a fixed location to complete the survey. CPA Board members, Convention Committee members, and CPA staff were excluded from participation. The survey was completed on-site and returned to the surveyors at the time. This method ensured that data were collected while the convention experience was fresh. Although some additional surveys were completed by attendees who independently volunteered, these data are not reported here. Random selection from the population should provide a sample that is representative of the convention attendee population; those who are motivated to volunteer might differ from this population in systematic ways. There were more surveyors in 2001 than in 2002, which resulted in a larger and more representative sample (N=234, versus N=51).

This presentation covers key results from 2001 and 2002. For complete results, consult the evaluation reports themselves, on the CPA WWW site at: <http://www.cpa.ca/ConEvaluations.htm>.

Results

Who Attends, and Why?

In both years, respondents were asked to identify themselves as primarily practitioners, scientist-practitioners, scientists, educators, or students. Many respondents found it difficult to place themselves in one category only, and in 2001 the data from this question were unusable (Table 1). A re-phrasing in 2002 seemed to be easier to answer, and revealed the following distribution:

<i>Table 1. Identity.</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Educator		16
Practitioner		22
Scientist-Practitioner		16
Scientist		26
Student		18
Other		2
Valid N	N/A	50
Missing		1
Total N		51

In 2002 only, respondents were asked to indicate in rank order the importance of 8 reasons for attending the convention (Table 2). Learning about one’s area of interest and presenting one’s work are the leading reasons for convention attendance.

<i>Table 2. Reasons for attending (2002 only).</i>	<i>2002 N</i>	<i>2002 Median</i>	<i>2002 Mode</i>
Learning about advances in my specific field of interest	45	2	1
Giving presentations/publication credit	43	2	2
Learning about advances in other areas of psychology	45	4	5
Learn about and have input into advocacy on behalf of science, education and practice	41	5	6
Continuing education / building practical skills	43	4	3
Networking opportunities	44	4	4
Tourist opportunities	42	7	8
Association meetings	41	7	8

How is the convention?

In both years, respondents were asked the same questions about their overall opinions of the convention. These are presented in side-by-side comparison in the following tables (Tables 3 – 5).

Despite the small sample for 2002, the results are in good agreement. Respondents generally rate the convention as being “good” or “excellent” and as giving good value in relation to its cost. Presentation quality is good or better, although it appears that the 2002 respondents might have been less impressed by its quality than in 2001.

<i>Table 3. Overall Rating of Convention</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Awful		
Bad	5.7	2
*	.4	
Okay	35.4	32
Good	48.5	54
*	.9	
Excellent	9.2	12
Valid N	229	50
Missing N	5	1
Total N	234	51

<i>Table 4. Value for Overall Cost</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Very poor value for the cost	3.5	
Poor value for the cost	18.4	18
*	.4	
Just about right	36.4	42
Good value for cost	28.5	18
Very good value for cost	12.7	22
Valid N	228	50
Missing N	6	1
Total N	234	51

<i>Table 5. Presentation Quality</i>	<i>Very poor (Valid %)</i>		<i>Poor (Valid %)</i>		<i>Okay (Valid %)</i>		<i>Good (Valid %)</i>		<i>Very Good (Valid %)</i>		<i>Valid N</i>	
	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>
Invited talks	1		2	3.4	13	6.9	27	20.7	57	69	102	29
Symposia			1	2.4	16	31.7	35	34.1	48	31.7	122	41
Posters	.6		1	7.7	12	28.2	45	38.5	41	25.6	150	39
Workshops						4.5		45.5		50		22
Conversation Sessions			1		23	14.3	45	42.9	30	42.9	69	21
Pre-conv. workshops		9.1		18.2	1		26	36.4	63	36.4	30	11

Where should it be?

Both 2001 and 2002 conventions were held on university campuses. The Board’s decision to make this experiment responded to member demand. In 2001, the principal accommodation was off-campus in the nearby suburb; in 2002 the principal accommodation was on the UBC campus. In both years we collected targeted data on both accommodation and the convention venue. Although data from hotel/convention centre sites is not yet available (planned for 2003), it is clear that not all university campuses are alike in their suitability for a convention. The 2001 site received many more low ratings than the 2002 site, both for the convention itself and for accommodation (Tables 6 and 7). In addition, the accommodation cost was lower for many people in 2002 than in 2001, probably because of the availability of on-campus accommodation (Table 8).

<i>Table 6. Overall Quality of Convention Venue</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Awful	4.7	
Bad	18.6	8.3
*	1.7	
Okay	36.6	52.1
*	.6	
Good	32.0	22.9
Excellent	5.8	16.7
Valid N	172	48
Missing N	62	3
Total N	234	51

<i>Table 7. Quality of your accommodation</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Awful	2.5	
Bad	8.2	2.5
*	.6	
Okay	35.4	35.0
*	.6	
Good	32.3	35.0
Excellent	20.3	27.5
Valid N	158	40
Missing N	76	11
Total N	234	51

<i>Table 8. Cost of accommodation</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Nothing	11.6	15.9
\$50 or less	16.9	15.9
\$51-\$100	19.2	40.9
\$101-\$150	39.5	15.9
\$151-\$200	12.8	11.4
> \$200		
Valid N	172	44
Missing N	62	7
Total N	234	51

In 2002 for the first time we asked explicitly about the preferred type of venue for future conventions. There is no clear consensus on this issue, although a majority appears to favour convention centres or hotels (Table 9).

<i>Table 9. Venue for future conventions</i>	<i>2001 Valid %</i>	<i>2002 Valid %</i>
Hotel		34.0
Convention Centre		17.0
University Campus		29.9
No preference		19.1
Valid N	N/A	47
Missing N		4
Total N		51

Discussion

The CPA Convention appears to be serving its attendees well in its present configuration, although there is room for improvement. In considering how to change or to improve the convention, attention should be paid to preserving the qualities that lead members to attend, particularly to allow people to present their own work and to learn about their own specific areas. CPA faces strong competition for convention attendance from the many speciality-specific psychology conferences and meetings, which can also fulfil the same needs for many people. Whether the convention serves all CPA members well is a matter for a separate investigation that includes those not present at the convention in any given year. The reasons for which these people choose not to attend CPA also need attention.

One of the most pressing questions for the Convention Committee concerns whether to hold the event on a university campus or in a hotel/convention centre. Data on this point show that the 2002 UBC venue was acceptable or better; although shabby in appearance, people appreciated the convenience of having events clustered close together. However, they did not like being far from downtown attractions. Taken together with the 2001 evaluation, it appears that university venues might be acceptable if they offer the convenience of one location together with adequate accommodations; but if the convention itself is not close to the accommodations (as in 2001), dissatisfaction results. In short, some universities might be suitable convention venues, and others will not. The 2003 data should provide further insight into this question.