

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

THE RELATIVE VALUE OF THE NATIONAL ABSEL MEETING: AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS BY FACULTY AND DEANS

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ABSTRACT

Pressures for expanded professional development activity are increasing at the same time travel budgets are becoming more and more inadequate. Thus, the choice of the "right" professional meeting to attend becomes a more critical decision for both faculty and deans. In this national survey of faculty and decanal perceptions of business-related professional meetings, the National ABSEL Meeting did not receive strong support.

THE PROBLEM

The Demand for Professional Development

As the information age thrusts the business world into rapidly changing environments, business leaders and business educators find themselves in almost a continuous state of flux. What was true yesterday, is false today. A management technique that was successful last week is ineffective today. Managers and management educators recognize the need to update technical skills, teaching methods, research methodology, and management perspectives. As an added impetus, the recent press, especially some recent best sellers, have been most critical of business school faculty for lack of real world business sense, for the inability to teach students how to apply theory to real problems, for devotion to scholarly research at the expense of teaching, and for outright teaching incompetencies. As a result of these factors, the need for more effective faculty professional development is absolute [3; 4; 5].

Selecting the Right Meeting

As the need for greater professional development has evolved, there has been a corresponding proliferation of academic professional association meetings devoted to this purpose. Thus, there is a growing need to develop more effective criteria by which to select the "right" meeting to attend. If the dean is expected to provide financial support for this professional activity and/or if that activity is to influence critical personnel decisions, such as tenure and promotion, then both the dean and the faculty person need to develop a new approach to selecting the "right" meeting.

Certainly, the selection of meetings in which to participate must consider the unique needs of the faculty person at that particular career point, prior academic preparation, current and future teaching! research responsibilities, career plans, professional rank and tenure status, teaching skills, practical experience, and technical competencies. Above all, the dean should consider that financial support of both professional and personal development can be a powerful motivator, especially for faculty that are frustrated by inadequate faculty salary structures.

One factor working on behalf of the faculty is the finding that deans tend to perceive significantly more value in

meeting attendance than faculty, perhaps in an effort to help justify the large sums of money they allocate for such activities [1; 2]. Prior research also reports that attendees rate meetings significantly higher than non-attendees. Thus, the dean's attitude toward the "right" meeting for a faculty person is influenced by the meetings the dean attends. In some cases, deans who have held that position for some time tend to attend those meetings that provide the best placement services, which can create another sort of criterion conflict.

Prior research [1] has found that deans prefer to support meetings that publish official Proceedings, assigning such a publication almost as much value as a journal publication. Deans also show preferences with respect to the level of participation, giving top priority to speakers and paper presenters, followed, in turn, by session chairs and discussants [1].

Recent Criticisms of Meetings

In the process of evaluating professional meetings, one might do well to consider some of the recent complaints about some meetings: (1) too many meetings incur unreasonable costs by locating in the "high cost" cities, such as New York or San Francisco; (2) some meetings increase the travel cost by selecting peripheral sites, such as Miami or Hawaii, when cheaper travel would result from the selection of more central locations, such as Kansas City or Memphis; (3) other meetings are held in "tourist traps" in an effort to increase the number of registrants, with the end result that fewer people attend the professional sessions; (4) some meetings seem to offer the same workshops and the same paper presenters every year, with no concern for creativity or innovation; (5) other meetings are seen as "good ol' buddy clubs," administered every year by the same old clique, with no opportunity for newcomers to become meaningfully involved; (6) some administrators expect faculty attendees to perform recruiting duties and, thus, prefer meetings with good placement services and tend to discourage attendance at meetings held too early in the recruiting year (August) or too late in the recruiting year (March/April); (7) some administrators perceive meetings to be little more than attractive nuisances that lure faculty away from their more important campus obligations; (8) still other administrators don't like the idea of their young stars going to meetings where they will be subjected to aggressive recruiting from other schools; and (9) too many meetings are criticized for the poor quality of the presentations, in spite of the "blind referee" process.

THE EXPERIMENT

The purpose of this study is to measure and compare the perceptions of business school faculty and business school deans with respect to the value of professional meeting, with special interest placed on the National ABSEL Meeting.

A questionnaire was developed to obtain certain demographic information in addition to responses to

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the test item, "Please circle on the scale from 1 (Low) to 7 (High) your perception of the relative value of faculty participation in the following professional meetings:...

Questionnaires were sent to business school faculty through the membership rosters of 13 business-related professional associations. Questionnaires were also sent to the deans of all the business schools that are members of the American Assembly of collegiate Schools of Business.

FINDINGS

A total of 165 usable questionnaires were returned by the business school deans. A total of 601 usable questionnaires were returned by faculty that identified with 13 teaching/research disciplines in a business school--Accounting, Statistics, Decision Sciences, Economics, Finance, Insurance, Management, Operations Management, Industrial Relations, Organizational Behavior, Policy, Marketing Research, and Transportation and Physical Distribution.

The decanal ranking of the 20 meeting categories are shown in Table 1. The three top-rated meetings received significantly high evaluations from the deans--The National Meeting of the American Accounting Association, the National Meeting of the American Marketing Association, and the National Meeting of the Academy of Management. Significantly low evaluations were reported for the National ABSEL Meeting, The National Risk and Insurance Meeting, the Southwestern Meeting, and the Midwest BBA Meeting. The National ABSEL Meeting was not well perceived by the deans, who ranked it seventeenth, overall, and ninth out of the ten national meetings.

TABLE 1
DEANS' EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEETINGS
(n=165)

| Meeting | National | | Regional | | Overall Rank |
|------------------------|----------|--------|----------|--------|--------------|
| | Rank | Mean | Rank | Mean | |
| American Acct. Assoc. | 1 | 5.55*# | | | 1 |
| American Mktg. Assoc. | 2 | 5.53*# | | | 2 |
| Academy of Management | 3 | 5.48*# | | | 3 |
| American Econ. Assoc. | 4 | 5.40* | | | 4 |
| Financial Mgt. Assoc. | 5 | 5.39* | | | 5 |
| AIDS | 6 | 4.96* | | | 6@ |
| American Acct. Assoc. | | | 1 | 4.96*# | 6@ |
| Acad. of Mktg. Science | 7 | 4.90 | | | 8 |
| American Mktg. Assoc. | | | 2 | 4.89* | 9 |
| ORSA/TIMS | 8 | 4.87 | | | 10@ |
| American Econ. Assoc. | | | 3 | 4.87* | 10@ |
| Financial Mgt. Assoc. | | | 4 | 4.71 | 12 |
| Academy of Management | | | 5 | 4.69 | 13 |
| AIDS | | | 6 | 4.24* | 14 |
| ORSA/TIMS | | | 7 | 4.03* | 15 |
| Southern Meetings | | | 8 | 3.96* | 16 |
| ABSEL | 9 | 3.95*# | | | 17 |
| Risk and Insurance | 10 | 3.90*# | | | 18 |
| Southwestern Meetings | | | 9 | 3.70*# | 19 |
| Midwest BAA Meeting | | | 10 | 3.61*# | 20 |
| * = Column Mean | | 5.00 | 4.37 | | |
| Overall Mean | | | 4.68 | | |

* = Significantly different from total mean of 4.68 (p<.05)

= Significantly different from column mean (p<.05)

@ = Tie in rank

The overall rankings of deans and faculty are compared in Table 2. Overall, the deans gave significantly higher evaluations to meetings than the faculty, supporting prior research [1;2]. However, the decanal support was focused mainly on the national meetings, as faculty gave significantly higher ratings to regional meetings than did the deans. The faculty also awarded significantly higher scores to the National ABSEL Meeting than the deans, ranking it in a tie for fourteenth place with the Southern Meetings.

TABLE 2
COMPARISONS OF DEAN MEANS AND FACULTY MEANS

| Meeting | Code | Deans (n=165) | | Faculty (n=601) | | Means Comparisons |
|------------------------|------|---------------|------|-----------------|------|-------------------|
| | | Rank | Mean | Rank | Mean | |
| American Acct. Assoc. | N | 1 | 5.55 | 1 | 5.52 | |
| American Mktg. Assoc. | N | 2 | 5.53 | 2 | 5.46 | |
| Academy of Management | N | 3 | 5.48 | 3 | 5.42 | |
| American Econ. Assoc. | N | 4 | 5.40 | 7 | 5.17 | * |
| Financial Mgt. Assoc. | N | 5 | 5.39 | 4 | 5.35 | |
| AIDS | N | 6 | 4.96 | 5 | 5.27 | * |
| American Acct. Assoc. | R | 6@ | 4.96 | 12 | 4.29 | * |
| Acad. of Mktg. Science | N | 8@ | 4.90 | 8 | 5.02 | * |
| American Mktg. Assoc. | R | 9 | 4.89 | 11 | 4.32 | * |
| ORSA/TIMS | N | 10@ | 4.87 | 6 | 5.18 | * |
| American Econ. Assoc. | R | 10@ | 4.87 | 16 | 4.23 | * |
| Financial Mgt. Assoc. | R | 12 | 4.71 | 13 | 4.27 | * |
| Academy of Management | R | 13 | 4.69 | 9 | 4.46 | * |
| AIDS | R | 14 | 4.24 | 10 | 4.41 | * |
| ORSA/TIMS | R | 15 | 4.03 | 18 | 4.07 | * |
| Southern Meetings | R | 16 | 3.96 | 14@ | 4.25 | * |
| ABSEL | N | 17 | 3.95 | 14@ | 4.25 | * |
| Risk and Insurance | N | 18 | 3.90 | 17 | 4.21 | * |
| Southwestern Meetings | R | 19 | 3.70 | 19 | 4.06 | * |
| Midwest BAA Meeting | R | 20 | 3.61 | 20 | 3.67 | * |
| TOTALS | | | 5.00 | | 4.64 | * |

Code: N = National Meeting
R = Regional Meeting

* = (p<.05)

Note: For Means Comparison, the highest mean is UNDERLINED.

TABLE 3
EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL ABSEL MEETING
By Faculty and Deans, By Region

| Region | Faculty | | Deans | | Means Comparisons |
|----------------------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------------------|
| | n | Mean | n | Mean | |
| New England | 54 | 4.26 | 13 | 4.38*# | |
| Mideast | 91 | 4.25 | 26 | 3.69* | @ |
| Great Lakes | 94 | 4.40 | 26 | 3.46*# | @ |
| Southeast | 129 | 4.27 | 37 | 3.97* | |
| Plains | 46 | 4.41 | 13 | 3.77* | @ |
| Southwest | 77 | 4.19 | 16 | 4.31 | |
| Rocky Mountains | 38 | 4.03* | 6 | 3.50* | @ |
| West | 72 | 4.19 | 28 | 4.39# | |
| East U.S. | 368 | 4.27 | 102 | 3.81* | @ |
| West U.S. | 233 | 4.21 | 63 | 4.16 | |
| East/West Comparison | | | | + | |
| TOTALS | 601 | 4.25 | 165 | 3.95* | @ |

* = Significantly different than total faculty mean (p<.05)

= Regional Dean mean significantly different than total Dean mean (p<.05)

@ = Faculty/Dean comparison significant (p<.05)

+ = East/West comparison significant (p<.05)

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The evaluations of the National ABSEL Meeting by faculty and deans are presented, by geographic region, in Table 3. The faculty perceptions were quite consistent, with the lone exception of significantly low evaluations reported by faculty from the Rocky Mountains. Among deans, significantly poor evaluations came from the Great Lakes, while significantly high evaluations came from New England and the West. Overall, deans in the Western U.S. report significantly higher evaluations of the National ABSEL Meeting than deans in the Eastern U.S.

Evaluations of the National ABSEL Meeting by faculty, by teaching/research discipline, are found in Table 4. Significantly strong support came from professors in Organizational Behavior and Management. Significantly low support is reported by faculty in Statistics, Decision Sciences, and Finance.

TABLE 4
EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL ABSEL MEETING
By Faculty and Deans, By Region

| <u>Discipline</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>Rank</u> | <u>Means</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------|
| Organizational Behavior Management | 56 | 1 | 5.88* |
| Policy | 70 | 2 | 5.16* |
| Industrial Relations | 43 | 3 | 4.58 |
| Marketing Research | 42 | 4 | 4.38 |
| Insurance | 62 | 5 | 4.13 |
| Accounting | 61 | 6 | 4.05 |
| Operations Management | 43 | 7 | 4.00 |
| Transportation & Phys. Distr. | 46 | 8 | 3.98 |
| Economics | 32 | 9 | 3.79 |
| Statistics | 22 | 10 | 3.77 |
| Finance | 27 | 11 | 3.48* |
| Decision Sciences | 59 | 12 | 3.42* |
| TOTAL FACULTY | 601 | | 4.25 |

* = Significantly different than total faculty mean (p<.05)

SUMMARY

This survey of 601 business school faculty and 165 business school deans finds rather poor evaluations of the relative value of faculty participation in the National ABSEL Meeting. The deans ranked the National ABSEL Meeting seventeenth out of twenty meetings surveyed, and they ranked it ninth out of ten national meetings. Although business school faculty perceived significantly more value in the National ABSEL Meeting, they still gave it poor rankings--tied for fourteenth out of twenty, and ninth out of the ten national meetings.

Further research might be justified to explain why deans in the Great Lake have such a poor image of the National ABSEL Meeting, as opposed to the high evaluations found among the deans in New England and the West. Faculty support needs to examine in the Rock" Mountains, where significantly low ratings were reported.

A challenge for the ABSEL membership would be to provide greater interdisciplinary involvement that would improve the evaluations from faculty in Policy, Industrial Relations, and Marketing Research--all disciplines that should have great potential for involvement in ABSEL.

REFERENCES

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