



A Monthly Newsletter from ADEA Executive Director Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H.

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In this month's letter, Dr. Rick Valachovic, Executive Director of the American Dental Education Association, reports on the recent ADEA CCI Liaisons' Conference.



Preparing Now for the Future of Dental Education

If you thought that the release of the Apple iPhone was the only event that created excitement in June, you didn't hear about the ADEA Commission on Change and Innovation in Dental Education (ADEA CCI) Liaisons' Conference, which was held in Chicago June 25-27, 2007.

The primary goal of the [ADEA Commission on Change and Innovation in Dental Education](#) is curriculum change that fosters lifelong learning. ADEA CCI was created in 2005 to build consensus within the dental community by providing leadership and oversight to a systemic, collaborative, and continuous process of innovative change in the education of general dentists. ADEA CCI is made up of representatives from dental education, organized dentistry, the dental licensure community, the Commission on Dental Accreditation, the ADA Council on Dental Education and Licensure, the Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations, higher education administration, and medical education. This year ADEA CCI asked dental schools to appoint teams of Liaisons who could assist in facilitating change and innovation. The ADEA CCI Liaisons first met this year at the ADEA Annual Session in New Orleans, and the Chicago meeting was the first national conference of ADEA CCI Liaisons.

ADEA CCI is not just about tweaking curriculum. It recognizes that there are many entities influencing and affecting the process and outcomes of dental education, such as the mission of parent institutions, integration of scientific discovery with clinical education, assessment (including assessment associated with accreditation standards), national boards and clinical licensure examinations, the culture of existing dental practice, the milieu of higher education, and even other health professions. While ADEA CCI holds that diversity of curricula is a strength, the Commission believes certain principles create the best environment for change and innovation for all dental education.

The ADEA CCI Liaisons' Conference in Chicago brought together more than 140 representatives from 46 U.S. and Canadian dental schools to compare experiences and strategies for promoting curriculum change in their schools, gain tools to move beyond the theoretical, and be inspired to be change agents in this critical effort.

One of our many fine speakers, Prof. William Hendricson, Assistant Dean for Education and Faculty Development at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and Senior Consultant with the Academy for Academic Leadership, reminded us of the importance of change for survival (or as one Liaison phrased it, "change or die!"). Bill noted that cavemen successfully taught their children the use of fire as a survival technique to ward off saber-toothed tigers. This education served society well until the advent of an ice age, when the tigers migrated to warmer climates. Cavemen, however, continued to maintain the fire "curriculum," neglecting to teach their children cold-weather survival skills, with disastrous results for the population.

The saber-toothed tiger analogy reminds us that education that served us well at one point in time does not necessarily serve us well forever. [The Gies Report](#), issued in 1926, set the standard for dental education for the 20th century, and many of its recommendations are still appropriate for the current climate and needs of society. But, as ADEA CCI has argued compellingly in "[The Case for Change in Dental Education](#)," now is the time to seize the opportunity to reexamine dental education for present and future students.

However, discussions on curriculum revision are not new. In 1995, [Dental Education at the Crossroads: Challenges and Change](#), the well-known report by the Institute of Medicine, made 22 recommendations with implications for dental education that continue to be discussed in 2007. Over the years the Journal of Dental Education, among other scholarly publications, has [debated](#) the need for and barriers to changing how academic institutions teach.

So why do we expect curriculum change to happen now? Dr. Kenneth Kalkwarf, ADEA Immediate Past President, Chair of ADEA CCI, and Dean of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Dental School, believes that change will happen now because "we have finally tied together curriculum change with specific objectives, and because now Liaisons have the connections to people and ADEA CCI support to become conduits to get their entire faculty involved. For the first time in history, the major stakeholder groups have come together. By working together, they can create systemic change."

Dr. Marsha Pyle, Associate Dean for Education at the Case School of Dental Medicine and a member of ADEA CCI, was thrilled so many schools were represented at the conference and echoed Dr. Kalkwarf's optimism. "It was energizing, and I believe it will build consensus for the possibility of change for many different kinds of faculties."

For many Liaisons, this conference was their first contact with ADEA, and they were excited to learn about the resources ADEA can provide to help them in their Liaison role. Dr. Craig Whitt of the University of Missouri-Kansas City is new to ADEA and to teaching, having had a previous career in the U.S. Navy. "The conference really opened my mind," Dr. Whitt said. "I expected and was looking forward to the pedagogy sessions, but I really appreciated the strategy sessions on bringing about change."

While no one had to camp in line overnight to participate in the conference (as was the case for the iPhone), Liaisons obviously saw it as a great opportunity and made a special effort to attend. Dr. Lillian Mitchell, Assistant Professor in the Department of Prosthodontics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, postponed her vacation trip to Iceland to come to Chicago!

Dr. Carol Bibb, Associate Dean of Student Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), found the conference so "intense" that she had to call her curriculum coordinator at UCLA at the end of the second day just to share her experience with someone. She (like everyone) was galvanized by Dr. Richard Paul's presentation on "Critical Thinking in a World of Accelerating Change, Intensifying Complexity, and Increasing Interdependence." Dr. Paul, Fellow and Director of Research at the Foundation for Critical Thinking, shared concepts and tools to help faculty, students, and administrators apply critical thinking in educational programs. Dr. Bibb and her colleague, on the phone after Dr. Paul's speech, shared a long-distance look at the [Foundation website](#). "It's no good if you don't take it back," she reasoned.

Undoubtedly Dr. Bibb related strongly to the way that Dr. Paul "connected the dots" for the audience with a simple (yet profound) diagram that represented what many learners want and what a curriculum based in critical thinking can provide. His description of the "Elements of Thought" came at a perfect moment in the conference.

Two other renowned speakers anchored plenary sessions. Dr. Alan Guskin, who has written widely on maintaining campus vitality in times of change, described how to create a clear and coherent vision of the future that is focused on student learning. His chart that placed "muddling through" side by side with "transforming the institution" was elegant in its simplicity.

Dental education's own Dr. Dominick DePaola presented the case for change in dental education. Delivered with sensibilities and sense that hit home, Dr. DePaola offered the hard facts that can't be ignored in pre- and postdoctoral

education today. Liaisons can access both these presentations online at the ADEA CCI Liaison site.

Dr. Tawana Feimster, a first-year assistant professor at Howard University College of Dentistry, "loves teaching." For Dr. Feimster, the conference provided exposure to upcoming changes in dental education. "It has equipped me with tools to introduce and implement the role of change at Howard. The highlight of the conference for me was exploring the integration of biomedical science into the curriculum."

Dr. Kurt Summersgill, chair of the curriculum committee at the University of Pittsburgh, admits that after six years in his position, his view of the possibility of curriculum change was "jaded" and focused on the barriers. The conference changed his outlook. "This has shown me how to get around the barriers and change people," he said. The highlights for Dr. Summersgill were the sessions on critical thinking, specifically the need to articulate and measure the results of this approach, and the concrete tools that he will take back from the sessions.

So, what happens next? The ADEA Board of Directors unanimously agreed at its June meeting that ADEA devote appropriate time, energy, and resources to ADEA CCI so that this initiative will continue to prosper. ADEA CCI Liaisons will meet again in Dallas at the 2008 ADEA Annual Session. In the meantime, ADEA CCI will develop a toolkit for Liaisons to use with faculty that may include an ADEA e-group on Critical Thinking and electronic sharing of curricula and other resources.

Curriculum change in dental education is happening, thanks to ADEA CCI. Stay tuned.



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