

Running a CHE Scholarship Conference:

Guiding principles for managers

Traditionally colleges have understood the need for academic staff to engage in scholarly activity but, while Boyer's model of scholarship emphasises the importance of the public nature of scholarship – what he referred to as a scholarship of engagement (1996) – they have been less active in sharing or going public. The idea of presenting at high profile conferences can be a daunting new experience but the value is significant in terms of staff development, confidence and morale, enhancing the student experience and raising the profile of your institution in the sector (and with local employers and organisations). An internal or joint conference or series of events is a good opportunity to participate in the conference experience in a more familiar environment and can be a stepping stone to external dissemination activity.

Types of event and conferences

Depending on the subject content and the audience, there are a variety of methods for dissemination of projects and staff/student research.

Annual conference

An annual conference may provide a large-scale audience for a more traditional presentation of research findings, with the opportunity for external stakeholders to attend and understand projects completed.

Regular scholarly presentation

It may be more accessible and less intimidating for staff/students to present projects at more regular events such as a monthly scholarly group. The location and setting can be adjusted to allow a greater level of participation from differing subject areas, and provide opportunities for members of these pathways to engage in understanding research activities from a wider spectrum.

Subject conferences

It may be appropriate to hold conferences which support HE programmes and assessments. Subject conferences offer students opportunities to share and enhance their understanding of the research they have completed as part of their studies. This may also form part of the assessment process.

Engaging with the wider community

Scholarly conferences provide an excellent opportunity for research and projects to be disseminated more widely, and to be subject to wider scrutiny. This is largely supported by wider academic research which suggests that scrutiny and engagement with the wider public is an essential part of a scholarly ethos. As Boyer famously stated, "The role of the professor is consequential only as it is understood by others" (Boyer, 1990). Wider engagement with the community, and employers in general, may lead to further opportunities for collaboration and research which would enhance the overall HE experience for staff, students and employers.

Encouraging staff to attend/present

College HE scholarship and research conferences allow staff, and perhaps students, to come together as an academic community; to hear what peers in other areas of the college or other institutions are doing; to share their own scholarship, and to engage in academic and professional dialogue. Colleges are often limited in what incentives and rewards they can offer staff to engage in scholarship; being given the opportunity to do research and scholarship and then share this with a wider audience can increase confidence and feelings of self-worth.

Encouraging staff/student collaboration

The opportunity to present at an annual conference can be the catalyst for joint staff/student scholarship projects and is beneficial for creating and embedding an HE ethos in a college setting. College HE teachers are often involved in their own research and scholarship that can be interesting and inspiring to students, and to which they could make a valuable contribution.

Institutional collaboration

Smaller colleges might opt to hold a conference with other colleges as you can share costs and divide the workload, and attendees get to hear from and talk to a wider range of people. However, with a group event the administrative burden is increased and you will need to regularly communicate with each other to ensure coverage and consistency.

You will also need to think about where to hold the event. You can take turns to host, though some colleges might have reservations about this relating to space and facilities. One solution would be to formally agree that each college will contribute to the hire costs for an external, 'neutral' venue (and indeed this does tend to make the event feel more rewarding and celebratory).

References:

- Boyer, E.L. (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
- Boyer, E.L. (1996) The Scholarship of Engagement in Journal of Public Outreach 1 (1) 11-20