Chapter 96
Moving Beyond the One–Shot for Professional Development:
The Value of the Intensive Institute Experience

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ABSTRACT

Conference presentations and vendor demonstrations are valuable, and these options often seem more economical as well. However, the benefits that can be gained for an individual and the institution from attending an intensive institute cannot be underestimated. Among the benefits of an intensive institute are gaining more in-depth knowledge about the topic, learning and collaborating more through the extended schedule, greatly enhanced opportunities for networking and learning from peers, and taking part in a learning community. This chapter will discuss these benefits and others. Just as research shows that semester-long courses can be more effective for developing information literacy skills than one-shot library instruction sessions, intensive institutes can provide a much richer professional development opportunity than an hour-long conference presentation. For adult learners, this type of environment can be much more valuable for short-term and long-term benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Conference presentations and vendor demonstrations are certainly valuable, whether one attends in person or via webinar. Librarians can learn about new products, hear about innovative ser-

vices being introduced at peer institutions, and network with colleagues. These choices often seem reasonably priced, particularly if located regionally. Although generally more expensive, the benefits that can be gained for an individual and the institution from attending an intensive institute cannot be underestimated. This decision requires more planning and more resources, but

what can be gained from sending the right person to the right institute can make this choice a highly beneficial and effective one.

Among the benefits of an intensive institute are: gaining more in-depth knowledge about the topic, learning and collaborating more through the extended schedule, greatly enhanced opportunities for networking and learning from peers, and taking part in a learning community. This chapter will discuss these benefits and others.

Just as research and experience show that semester-long courses can be more effective for developing information literacy skills than one-shot library instruction sessions (see Sugarman & Mosby, 2002; Farkas, 2012; Kenney, 2008; Ward, 2006; Schein et al, 2011), intensive institutes can provide a much richer professional development opportunity than an hour-long conference presentation. For adult learners, this type of environment can be much more valuable for short-term and long-term benefits.

INTENSIVE INSTITUTES

Adult learners have different needs, such as a desire for self-direction, a preference for individual choice in learning environment, clear connections between the course material and real life situations, relevant class activities, and the need for clear sequencing and reinforcement (see Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2006; Vella, 2002; Daloz, 1999; Bash, 2003). These needs can rarely be met in a fifty-minute session.

A single conference session can successfully convey a limited amount of information, but will not be able to address or include all of the aspects noted above. Conferences often have themes or tracks, but these are generally not designed to be experienced as a cohesive set. A single conference session does not require the same level of curricular planning, of course, and some topics may not warrant extensive coverage, but attention to details about the needs of adult learners can always improve the content and delivery, regardless of the length or type of session.

Intensive institutes allow for more in-depth engagement with a topic or a range of topics and offer a variety of instructors and instructional experiences. The extended timeline provides opportunities for reflection and continued discussion, for discussing multiple case studies, for hearing from many different instructors and presenters, and for enhanced networking opportunities among participants. There are often lectures or presentations for the entire cohort, but ample time for small group work and personal reflection is built in. Some of these small group experiences may involve a "birds of a feather" approach, where people from similar institutions and/or similar positions are grouped together.

Often held on a campus, these institutes provide a complete immersion experience, from breakfast to lights out. In addition to the classroom time, intensive institutes provide meals for the whole group, and housing is often provided on campus as well, in a residence hall setting. There are often activities in the evenings, sometimes social ones, but sometimes they are for further work, such as group discussions or meeting with instructors. Having homework for the next day is not uncommon. Advice from former participants indicates that one needs to be able to take advantage of the time for reflection and to be fully prepared and engaged in the sessions without trying to simultaneously perform one's regular duties back home (Golian & Donlan, 2001; Kalin, 2008).

It is also typical to be assigned work before the institute begins. In addition to readings, there is often an assignment to draft what will become the final product of the institute, such as an assessment program, a teaching plan, or a solution to an issue. In many cases, part of what is prepared ahead of time will form the basis for the introductory activity. The intention to provide a learning community is not lightly taken by those who plan and execute intensive institutes.

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