

A Legacy of Collaboration

In May 2005, CUMREC held its fiftieth and final conference for administrative and enterprise computing professionals in higher education. In reflecting on the relatively long history of this organization (long in Internet time) and its conference, its evolution, and the state of technology today, those of us who benefit from its legacy have something to learn from the past as we continue to look to the future.

In 1955, Frank B. Martin, who was then director of data processing at Michigan State University, convened a group of his colleagues who were working in data processing at higher education institutions in the United States. (At that time, general-purpose computers were new, punch cards were in use, and most of the “computing” happening on campuses was in the research realm.) Martin wanted to share some ideas, learn from what was happening at other institutions, and foster communication among colleagues working in this new world of information technology. As the years went by, that informal gathering would become CUMREC, the “College and University Machine REcords Conference,” hosted annually by a member institution to provide a forum for higher education administrative IT professionals to share their expertise and experiences. In the 1970s, a special interest group was formed among the CUMREC members to share application source code (similar to today’s open source movement), and from that came a new association: CAUSE (College And University Systems Exchange). Along with Educom, CAUSE became a parent organization of EDUCAUSE. Today,

EDUCAUSE is an association with 1,900 member institutions serving more than 50,000 professionals through initiatives in IT leadership, information systems, applied research, teaching and learning, IT policy, networking, and advanced technologies, as well as through a wide range of conferences, seminars, publications, and other professional development opportunities. I think Frank Martin would be surprised to see what was spawned by his desire to collaborate with a few colleagues.

Even though the CUMREC conference changed in focus, attendees, and programming over the years, one thing remained the same: IT professionals’ need to interact and to collaborate. From the earliest days, the CUMREC founders recognized the value of what we now call “professional development.” By talking about our work and presenting our ideas, we are engaging our colleagues and developing new collaborations that will not only help us grow professionally but benefit our institutions as well. For many of us, the realization that we are not just IT professionals, but IT professionals within the broader domain of higher education, came through this very type of professional engagement.

Fostering a culture of professional development and growth is important at all levels of a career, and it is particularly important for those who are new to the higher education IT environment. In recent years, the CUMREC conference became a place for mid-level IT staff and management to get their first exposure to the broader profession and to give their first presentations. Maintaining opportunities that will be welcoming to

emerging professionals and that will be attractive to those with experience to share will be an important part of future professional development efforts for our community. Key to these efforts will be the past winners of the Frank Martin Service Award, individuals who are now and will continue to be contributors to the IT profession on their campuses, within our associations, and among our network of colleagues.

Many of the early IT pioneers could never have envisioned the university or college of 2005. In 1955, who would have imagined online registration systems or the widespread use of technology in the classroom or ubiquitous computers, cell phones, iPods, Google, and blogs? The development of the Internet and the rapid rate of technological change has had, and will continue to have, a profound effect on higher education, not only in learning and research but also in all facets of the management of our institutions.

Although the early pioneers could not have predicted the kinds of technologies we are using in 2005, they certainly anticipated that the rapidly changing IT profession would require current and future generations to be in a constant state of renewal. In that spirit, Frank Martin’s legacy is flourishing today and will continue long after the fiftieth anniversary of the collaboration he started.

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