

In Service to Higher Education

As the holidays are approaching and the year is coming to a close, many of us are likely reviewing the events of the last twelve months—examining our successes and our failures, considering where we have come from and where we are going, and reflecting on what really matters to us. Today I find myself thinking about why I have chosen to work in, and stay involved with, higher education. For many of us in higher education, particularly those who are not faculty or otherwise directly involved in teaching, the decision to build a career in service to higher education was not driven simply by a desire to extend our undergraduate years or out of loyalty to our alma mater. And we are certainly not getting rich. Rather, we believe in the fundamental importance of education to society, and we want to play a part.

Over the years, a strong sense of community has developed among the people who provide the IT services and leadership to our institutions. EDUCAUSE (like its predecessors Educom and CAUSE) was created and has evolved in order to support that community. The association is sustained by the efforts of its members, a fact that is evident in the strikingly large number of people who volunteer their time and talent in service to each other, without the expectation of payment or personal gain.

The number of volunteers continues to grow. In 2007, almost 400 people volunteered to fill upcoming vacancies on EDUCAUSE advisory committees and program committees. These individuals do real, productive work, resulting in the programs that are delivered at con-

ferences, the creation and dissemination of important content (e.g., the *Effective IT Security Practices and Solutions Guide* and the *Learning Spaces* e-book), and the development of key EDUCAUSE services and programs (e.g., the Core Data Service and the EDUCAUSE Awards program).

During this year, 25 volunteers from the senior-executive levels of our community spent a full week (and some spent two weeks) as faculty leading the EDUCAUSE institutes, which are intensive, week-long, residential leadership-development programs for IT professionals. The more than 275 attendees benefited directly from their efforts.

Last year, 617 individuals either spoke at the annual conference or conducted in-depth workshops for their colleagues on a variety of topics the day before the conference began. Sessions at regional and special-topic conferences were delivered by 1,025 people. More than 1,200 people served on the program committees that planned these events or on special task forces and advisory committees for EDUCAUSE. I could go on about the number of people who contributed chapters to books, who shared advice and counsel with their colleagues via the EDUCAUSE listservs, blogs, and wikis, and who wrote articles for EDUCAUSE publications. And I am talking only about involvement in EDUCAUSE—just one association. On every campus, every day, people connected with IT are working locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally to serve their colleagues and institutions well beyond what is called for in their daily jobs.

The efforts put forth by volunteers

not only benefit the community but also provide rewards to the individual and to his or her institution. The faculty who teach in the institutes I described above report that they return to their campuses with a renewed enthusiasm for their work. The conference speakers and the publication authors gain experience and professional recognition for the work they do while building their own reputations as well as those of their institutions. In addition, institutions receive a return on investment when new ideas and effective practices are introduced to campus as a direct result of volunteers' interactions.

A colleague recently told me: "As leaders and creators of leaders among our staff, we must participate and encourage participation within our profession." She added that for her, the value of having an association behind the conferences and other events she attends is that the association provides continuous opportunities for this engagement with the profession and for building and sustaining strong professional communities. These communities and this collegial spirit are, for me, a large part of what has made working in higher education so comfortable and so rewarding, benefits that continue still in my association work.

So today, as I reflect on the past year, I also look forward to the new one, which will bring more opportunities for working with many of you to build, support, and sustain our chosen profession—in service to higher education.

Cynthia Golden, Vice President of EDUCAUSE, leads the association's work in professional development.