

American Evaluation Association

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“Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries”, was the theme of the 2005 Joint Canadian Evaluation Society/American Evaluation Association (AEA/CES) Conference was held October 24-30 at the Sheraton Centre downtown Toronto, Canada.

Approximately 2500 individuals from around the world attended this year’s conference. Attendees said the joint AEA/CES program was very informative and provided a unique opportunity to network with researchers and evaluators from around the globe.

There was a vast amount of information available at the conference, from the instructor-led discussions to the roundtables. There was also a good amount of new and updated information on research and evaluation that was represented by book publishers, authors and vendors. Book seekers could find publications on everything from “Statistics for People who Hate Statistics” to “Collaborative Evaluation”. There were a number of publications that were available free of charge to conference attendees.

In terms of a quick reflection, there was much to do at the conference during the days and evenings as well. Professional development pre-conference workshops began bright and early at 8:00 am Monday morning and ran through Tuesday. The Opening Plenary was delivered mid-afternoon on Wednesday, followed by the innovative Poster Competition; and thereafter concluded by the Student Reception Wednesday evening. Thursday was power-packed with evaluation panel discussions and Thursday evening was highlighted by a group outing to the Historic Steam Whistle Brewing Company. Friday introduced the recruitment fair and Friday evening was accented by a quick-bidding silent auction with items from around the world. Saturday presented a wide range of topics and roundtables and Sunday wound-down with more professional development workshops. The entire content, plus abstracts, can be found online at www.eval.org/eval2005.

The big themes for this year's 2005 joint AEA/CES conference included debates on how to get more people involved in evaluation through topics such as empowerment evaluation, and how to get people working better in evaluations through discussions on collaborative evaluation. Roundtable topics that were popular centered around consulting skills and competency improvement for evaluators. There were a host of workshops that were beneficial in providing information on different evaluation approaches. It was also good to see the global and community focus initiatives of evaluators through many topics such as "Introducing Evaluation to the Developing Countries" and "Evaluating Substance Abuse Programs".

The Keynote addresses were well received. Sheila Fraser, Auditor General of Canada, spoke on Independence in the Context of Audit . Roberta Jamieson, CEO National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, spoke on Diplomacy, Democracy

and Indigenous Peoples. Lieutenant-General, Roméo Dallaire delivered an address on Speaking Truth to Power.

Many big names and "founding fathers", such as Michael Scriven, Robert Brinkerhoff, David Fetterman, James Sanders, Michel Quinn Patton were at this year's conference, which added to the depth of the intellectual discussions. It was a great opportunity to get signed copies of books and first hand perspectives from decades of experience in evaluation.

There were very few criticisms about the conference. The overall program, location, food, entertainment, accommodations, conference support staff and vendors were good to exceptional. However, some conference attendees indicated that they would have like to have seen less topics on research and more on what they define as evaluation. Some rooms also appeared to have a very large draw of attendees and sometimes were a little crowded.

The 2006 AEA conference is scheduled for Monday, October 30 through Saturday, November 4th and will be held in Portland, OR. The schedule will be similar with professional development programs beginning on Monday, and the opening plenary starting Wednesday afternoon. The conference will conclude on Saturday instead of Sunday.