



Department Executive Officers Seminar

Program Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Big Ten Academic Alliance Department Executive Officers (DEO) Seminar is a leadership development program for academic department heads and chairs at the Big Ten Academic Alliance universities. Each year approximately 70 participants come together for a three-day seminar in the fall. Topics at this event range from conflict resolution and the pragmatics of leadership to faculty development, performance reviews, and group problem solving. Individuals are selected by their respective campuses. The Big Ten Academic Alliance conducts program evaluations on a rotating schedule. This report is a summary of the program evaluation on the DEO Seminar conducted in 2018.

The evaluation suggests that the DEO Seminar continues to be a valuable program. Participating campuses confirmed the seminar provides a unique collaborative professional development opportunity that cannot be replicated easily on individual campuses. The seminar effectively complements new and existing chairs/heads development programs on each Big Ten Academic Alliance campus.

Over the 20-year collaborative partnership, the DEO Seminar has been successful in providing leadership development opportunities for our department heads and chairs. The Big Ten Academic Alliance and the evaluation committee¹ identified the following successes:

- ❑ **DEO offers a leadership development opportunity for department heads and chairs that is worthwhile and provides value beyond what any single campus can do individually.** This target population is ideal for a Big Ten Academic Alliance collaborative leadership development program. The role of department chair or head provides a shared frame of reference for this cohort. The seminar is able to provide a unique mix of both pragmatic, skills-based training and broad, holistic leadership development.
- ❑ **The Critical Friends session offers a unique dynamic to this program.** Because of the strong emphasis on confidentiality and the way in which groups are assigned, participants can share a sensitive problem with DEOs in similar roles at other campuses and identify viable solutions to the problem in a safe and supportive environment.
- ❑ **The Offices of the Provosts remain the appropriate funding source for the Seminar.** Provost Office funding provides all departments equal opportunity for participation in the Seminar.
- ❑ **The optimal cohort size is 5 participants per campus.** The size of the DEO cohort should not increase or decrease significantly as this would change the group dynamics.
- ❑ **DEO participants should have served in the role at least 1 year and no more than 3 years.** DEOs need a minimum of 6 months to one year of experience to actively engage in the Seminar. The majority of liaisons have found that the Seminar best complemented individual campus programs for DEOs in their second or third year. However, some campuses have found that the seminar can be a valuable experience for more experienced DEOs as well.
- ❑ **DEO Liaison participation in the Seminar is necessary.** DEO liaisons provide guidance, structure, and facilitation at the seminar. The program relies on the expertise and experience liaisons can offer. Liaisons have always served as facilitators for the Critical Friends sessions, and beginning in 2017, liaisons have become more fully involved in the program as both facilitators and presenters for the workshop sessions.

¹ Program evaluation committee members include Steve Abel, Purdue University, Michael Bernard-Donals, University of Wisconsin, Charity Farber, Big Ten Academic Alliance, Ole Gram, University of Minnesota, and Juli Wade, Michigan State University.

The Big Ten Academic Alliance and the DEO liaisons have had the opportunity to develop the Seminar over the years. Based on the evaluation of the program as it has evolved, the Big Ten Academic Alliance and the evaluation committee recommend the following:

- ❑ **Convene the DEO Seminar in the fall.** Until relatively recently, the DEO seminar was held in the winter months. In 2011, the seminar moved to a fall (i.e., October or November) event in order to minimize the risk of weather-related cancellations. The evaluation committee recommends continuing the practice of convening the seminar in the fall.
- ❑ **Develop overarching goals and refine objectives for the DEO program.** Consistent with other Big Ten Academic Alliance programs, such as the Academic Leadership Program, DEO should develop overarching goals and refine the objectives for this program. The goals and objectives will guide the annual evaluation of the Seminar and serve as the basis for future change.
- ❑ **Evaluate communication styles, personality traits, and/or leadership styles assessment tools to determine best resource for DEO participants.** Various tools exist to evaluate issues such as communication styles, personality traits, and leadership characteristics. Over the past five years, the DiSC profile has been used for the Seminar. Consideration should be given to other available tools, taking into account validity, cost, and application to the specific roles of department executive officers. DEO Liaisons should review and test applicable tools to determine the best fit for the DEO Seminar.
- ❑ **Continue to host a social networking event on the second evening.** Starting in 2015, the second evening of DEO transitioned from individual campus dinners at local establishments to an interactive gathering at Kings Bowling in Rosemont. This activity was added in response to participant requests for increased networking opportunities and the need for a non-sedentary event as part of the seminar.
- ❑ **Incorporate new topics to enhance the current program.** The content of the program needs to be up-to-date with workplace trends in higher education. Feedback regarding the speakers and topics should continue to be a priority when determining the agenda each year. The program also needs to respond to the changing challenges facing DEOs at Big Ten Academic Alliance campuses.
- ❑ **Consider cross-institutional resource sharing.** The content included in DEO is valued by liaisons across the Big Ten Academic Alliance. Consideration should be given to the creation of cross-institutional tools and/or a resource library to augment campus-based training provided by liaisons for new DEOs who are unable to attend an annual DEO seminar.

Evaluation Methodology

This program evaluation was coordinated by Charity Farber, associate director for programs team, Big Ten Academic Alliance, in consultation with an advisory committee. Ole Gram, University of Minnesota, served as the chair for the evaluation. The advisory committee included three additional DEO Liaisons: Steve Abel, Purdue University, Michael Bernard-Donals, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Juli Wade, Michigan State University. Key program constituencies include the Big Ten Academic Alliance Provosts, DEO liaisons, and program participants. Various methods were used to gather feedback for the evaluation including historical documentation review, stakeholder interviews, and program participant surveys. The evaluation team reviewed past Big Ten Academic Alliance provosts' meeting minutes, DEO

liaison meeting minutes, the original DEO program proposal, and DEO Seminar agendas² from the past five years.

Advisory committee members conducted interviews with the DEO liaisons during the spring of 2018. These interviews sought answers to the following questions:

1. Does the DEO Seminar provide new learning opportunities and/or leadership experiences not available on your own campus?
2. How can local programs better complement the DEO Seminar?
3. Is the DEO Seminar a good investment? Should costs be reduced? Is the Provost’s Office the right funding source?
4. Is the number of participants appropriate and effective?
5. Is the program targeting the right audience?
6. What time of the year works best for hosting this professional development opportunity?
7. What are the pros and cons of the current seminar topics?
8. Because the Critical Friends exercise is such a large portion of the program, is it appropriate and effective?
9. The DEO seminar was restructured in 2017 to include a broader range of topics and it relied more heavily on DEO liaisons as facilitators and presenters. How would you assess this change in programming?
10. In an ideal world, how would the DEO Seminar be different?

Responses to these interviews with past and current DEO liaisons are reflected in the recommendations contained in this document. The feedback from past liaisons largely mirrors the collective recommendations of the current group of DEO liaisons, and it is indicative that the feedback from liaisons reflects to a large degree the feedback received from seminar participants.

After each DEO Seminar, participants are asked to complete an online survey consisting of Likert scale items and open-ended questions. The results of the survey show for the period 2011-2017, participants rated the overall value of seminar highly with scores ranging from 4.44 to 4.89 on a 5-point Likert scale. Item ratings for individual sessions and presenters focusing on clarity of content and presentation delivery have been consistently above the mean for all sessions and broadly confirm the value of the program that can be gleaned from the global assessment item. At the annual DEO summer planning meeting, evaluation data and open-ended comments are reviewed by liaisons in order to adjust future programming and provide in-depth feedback to presenters. Liaisons also solicit informal feedback from participants after the seminar to gather additional information about their impressions of the program.

Fig. 1. Overall Seminar Rating; Likert scale 1.0 - 5.0

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
4.70	4.44	4.75	4.72	4.63	4.89	4.56

² Materials are available from the Big Ten Academic Alliance headquarters upon request.

Program Overview

History of DEO

In 1995, the Faculty Issues Working Group of the Big Ten Academic Alliance identified the need for professional development opportunities for department heads and chairs, often referred to as Department Executive Officers (DEOs). A subcommittee of provosts charged the Big Ten Academic Alliance (then the Committee on Institutional Cooperation) and campus administrators whose responsibilities included faculty development to aggregate appropriate materials and determine if a consortium-wide model should be adopted. This committee proposed piloting an annual Big Ten Academic Alliance Seminar for academic department chairs, heads, and directors. As a result of this recommendation, the Department Executive Officers (DEO) Development Seminar was launched in 1997.

The Seminar takes place once each academic year. Over the years it has transitioned between a fall, winter, or spring session. Since 2011, the Seminar has taken place in the fall in either October or November. The event takes place at the Big Ten Center in Chicago, which significantly reduced costs and provides a convenient location for those flying into the city. Participation in the Seminar is optional for Big Ten Academic Alliance institutions. Universities send a cohort of up to 5 participants and a DEO liaison to help facilitate the workshop.

Program Objectives³

The Seminar focuses on topics involving departmental leadership skills, including but not limited to conflict resolution, time management, and performance review of faculty. The initial objectives of the Seminar are twofold:

1. To hone the skills of the participants in these (and other) key areas; and
2. To develop a cadre of highly trained and motivated individuals who could be more effective in inculcating their skills and experience on their own campuses.

Through the 2011 evaluation process, a third program objective emerged:

3. To develop an infrastructure of department heads and chairs who can communicate regarding key topics at Big Ten Academic Alliance universities.

This evaluation highlighted the need to develop overarching goals for the DEO Seminar. Once developed, the current three objectives will be refined. These goals and objectives will provide a framework for DEO liaisons to benchmark for future Seminar sessions and activities.

The Seminar serves as a venue to generate resource materials, network with colleagues across the Big Ten Academic Alliance, and engage in group problem-solving activities. It provides a venue for sharing of best practices with best practitioners.

³ Committee on Institutional Cooperation. *Members (Provost) Meeting*. 25 February 1997.

Program Structure and Content

Although participation in the Seminar is voluntary, 14 member institutions⁴ participate in the program. Starting in 2012, the Seminar takes place in the fall in order to minimize weather related cancellations and to balance the faculty leadership development opportunities under the portfolio of the Vice Provosts. The DEO Seminar format mirrors the agenda of an Academic Leadership Program (ALP) Seminar, which is a year-long, more extensive leadership development opportunity established 8 years prior to DEO. The DEO Seminar begins with a lunch on Thursday afternoon and ends with lunch on Saturday. Over the course of the three days, DEO campus liaisons and guest speakers address the group on various topics. Participants also engage in a group problem-solving exercise, referred to as Critical Friends, which serves as an anchor to the seminar. This exercise allows participants to apply knowledge and experience to current participant challenges. The 2017 DEO Seminar agenda is provide in Appendix A.

For the Critical Friends sessions, DEO liaisons facilitate several discussion sessions with small groups of approximately seven participants. During these sessions, each DEO participant presents a question or problem to be addressed by the small group. No individual from the small group, including the facilitator, is from the same university or department/discipline; this is an important feature as it allows participants to speak openly and candidly about campus or departmental issues in a highly confidential setting. Because the groups are facilitated by DEO liaisons, the liaisons are able to take note of general themes (e.g., diversity, promotion and tenure) that are addressed during these sessions. These themes are used to identify future Seminar topics as well as issues for campuses to address during their local programs. In addition to specific problem solving, the exercise teaches DEOs the value of feedback and consultancy in the decision-making process. As a result, participants learn department heads and chairs often share the same issues regardless of discipline. Based on annual formal feedback on the seminar, participants consistently perceive great value in the Critical Friends exercise, which is a significant portion of the program. Although a substantial amount of time is allotted to the Critical Friends experience, evaluations and interviews with both participants and liaisons reflect that these sessions are critical to the Seminar and that the amount of time allotted to this exercise is appropriate.

Over the past five years, the DiSC profile has been used for the Seminar. Overall, participants have found this to be a useful tool for self-reflection. Various tools exist to evaluate issues such as communication styles, personality traits, and leadership characteristics. While this has been valuable resource, consideration should be given to other available tools, taking into account validity, cost, and application to the specific roles of department executive officers. DEO Liaisons should review and test applicable tools to determine the best fit for the DEO Seminar.

Starting in 2015, the second evening of DEO transitioned from individual campus dinners at local establishments to an interactive gathering at Kings Bowling in Rosemont. It is an expectation that all campuses participate in the event, as this is a continuation of the seminar program. This activity was added in response to participant requests for increased networking opportunities and the need for a non-sedentary event as part of the seminar. Inclusion of this event has been positively received by participants and liaisons and has not significantly increased the overall program costs per participant while accomplishing networking goals.

⁴University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, and University of Wisconsin-Madison

Until 2017, the seminar incorporated keynote national speakers presenting on topics matched with their expertise. While successful, seminar evaluations identified the need to expand the variety of topics and incorporate additional perspectives through more diverse speakers. In fall 2017, the seminar introduced new topics and sessions that provided a greater balance between broad leadership reflection exercises and practical DEO management skills. The DEO liaisons possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise on agenda topics and agreed broader participation in program delivery would enhance content and reinforce the availability of local resources to program participants following their return to campus.

Topics and speakers are evaluated following each seminar, which provides critical feedback regarding the sessions, speakers, and logistics. Based on this feedback and the liaisons' recommendations, speakers and topics are adjusted and adapted to ensure that the Seminar remains an innovative professional development opportunity (See Appendix B for 2017 Seminar participation quantitative evaluation summary).

The content included in the DEO Seminar is valued by liaisons across the Big Ten Academic Alliance. Consideration should be given to the creation of cross-institutional tools and/or a resource library to augment campus-based training provided by liaisons for new DEOs who are unable to attend an annual DEO seminar.

DEO Participants

The DEO Seminar is a complement to professional development activities and programs conducted on the local campuses. Each campus identifies its DEO participants who ideally have two to three years of experience in order to actively engage in the Seminar. From the 2011-2017 program surveys, 86% of the participants identified themselves as having no more than 3 years of experience as a department head or chair. Although the Seminar is a best fit for relatively new DEOs, the liaisons are encouraged to select participants based on how the program best complements their campus programming.

Over the years, it has been established that the optimal cohort size is 5 participants per campus. This level of participation allows for campus diversity in the small groups and breakout conversations during Seminar sessions. Increasing or decreasing the number of participants significantly would create logistical challenges and alter the group dynamics. Decreasing the number of participants would diminish the diversity of perspectives because there would be fewer disciplines represented; increasing the number of participants would create an impersonal atmosphere with less opportunity for networking and group interaction.

The cost of participating in the DEO Seminar averaged \$720 per person from 2011-2013 and \$740 per person from 2014-2017. Until 2013, the Seminar was hosted at various hotels near the Chicago O'Hare Airport. In 2014, the DEO Seminar transitioned to the newly developed Big Ten Center with lodging at the adjacent Aloft Hotel, which reduced costs associated with food and meeting space. The cost slightly increased with the move to the Big Ten Center because two key expenses (i.e., hotel costs for attendees and a dinner) were redistributed from the individual campus budget to the DEO Seminar budget. Overall, DEO is a modest cost compared to similar leadership programs, many of which costs thousands of dollars per participant⁵. DEO participants are funded by the Office of the Provost on their respective campuses. This model remains the appropriate funding mechanism as it allows the campuses to be in charge of participant selection and it provides open access to the program for all types of departments, regardless of their size or budget.

⁵ <http://departmentchairinstitute.net/> or <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/program/management-development-program-mdp>

Summary

All evaluation data indicate that the DEO Seminar is a valuable collaborative effort and the changes to the program introduced in 2017 were successful. The Seminar complements the local professional development opportunities on each campus. The structure of the Seminar is well-balanced between group activity, panel presentations, formal presentations, and networking opportunities. Presenters and facilitators make a conscious effort to incorporate case studies, group activities, and active learning components in their presentations.

Department heads and chairs are the appropriate audience for the Seminar. While there was concern regarding the title of Department Executive Officers (DEO) Seminar in the 2011 evaluation, the liaisons determined that changing was not the appropriate direction for the well-established program.

Recommendations for Big Ten Academic Alliance Members and DEO Liaisons

This evaluation resulted in the following recommendations to enhance the quality of the Seminar experience:

- The DEO Seminar should continue. All sources of data indicate the DEO Seminar is a valuable and necessary program.
- The offices of the provosts should continue to fund the Seminar. Provost office funding provides all departments equal opportunity for participation in the Seminar.
- While allowing for liaison discretion in campus selection of participants, DEOs in their second or third year should be the target audience for the Seminar. Ideally, campuses will send 5 participants to the Seminar.
- The Seminar should continue to be offered in autumn in order to ensure the highest level of participation and avoiding weather related cancellations. Overall, the length of the program is appropriate and the timing--Thursday noon to Saturday noon--optimizes participation and travel logistics.
- DEO liaisons should develop overarching goals for the Seminar and refine existing objectives to help build a framework for future Seminar themes and topics.
- The Seminar agenda should incorporate new topics on a regular basis to ensure that this leadership development opportunity remains fresh, timely, and cutting-edge.
- The Seminar should continue to rely on the expertise of DEO liaisons and select rotating outside speakers rather than one or two keynote presenters.
- Continue to use problem-based learning (i.e., Critical Friends), personal reflection assessments (e.g., DiSC), active learning techniques, and networking activities (i.e., social networking dinner) consistent with revised program format.
- Consider cross-institutional resource sharing.