

## **Fostering Communication Among 2-year College Geoscience Faculty: Trials and Tribulations**

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*What strategies have you or your program used to meet one or two of the challenging aspects of teaching at a two-year college?*

Ten years ago, I was a participant in the first planning workshop for broadening participation of 2-year colleges in geoscience education. Since then, some changes have taken place to improve things for 2-year college geosciences, but many of the concerns and problems shared among the participants at that first conference are still with us—limited resources, professional isolation, the absence of a national organization devoted to 2YC geoscience education issues, etc.

One of the issues discussed at that first workshop was the lack of communication and sharing of ideas between 2YC geoscience faculty. Most 2-year colleges employ only one geoscientist (if they have any), in their science departments, which can lead to a sense of isolation. Several of us at that time were also involved in the planning process of the Digital Library of Earth System Education (DLESE), and we were successful in starting a discussion group for 2YC faculty that resided in DLESE. This was essentially an email list, and it attracted some interest and discussion among 2YC geoscience faculty, but it was short-lived. Interest waned, and within two years the list was inactive. Recently, a new email group dedicated to 2YC geoscience education issues has appeared, thanks to Heather Macdonald and the Science Education Resource Center at Carleton College (SERC). Although the list has an extensive subscriber base (more than 600 email addresses), to date there hasn't been much activity from 2YC faculty—mostly announcements (posted by Heather), of professional development activities that might be of interest to 2YC faculty, including the workshop for which this essay is being written ☺.

However, email may not be the ideal medium for engaging others in discussion about topics of interest. My opinion comes from two different professional experiences: teaching online and serving on the executive board of the Michigan Science Olympiad (MSO). While the former has clear ties to the challenges faced by 2YC teaching, the latter may not be so obvious, until we consider the fact that both involve the timely exchange of information related to a single concept or group of related topics. Although discussions can be carried on via email, the experience is often less than satisfactory, because the conversations become fragmented, there is often no easily retrieved archive of previous conversations, and a host of other problems with which I am sure most of you are familiar. This problem is easily solved in online teaching through the use of discussion boards included in the content delivery system (e.g., Blackboard or Moodle), but these technologies are not applicable to an organization like the MSO board.

To solve our problem, we (MSO) recently started a group on LinkedIn, a web-based networking service. This has met our needs well, keeping conversations focused, and providing an archive of past discussions that can be accessed easily for future use. I believe that a similar group should be started for 2YC geoscience educators, hosted on LinkedIn or a similar service, or perhaps hosted by SERC as a follow-up to this workshop. I believe that one of the reasons our earlier attempt at fostering a 2YC discussion group failed was due to the shortcomings of communicating via email, and that we might be more successful by using a different strategy in the future.