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Family Preservation Conference Participants and the Internet: Opinions about On-Line Continuing Education

Timothy Barnett-Queen

Development of distance and distributed learning continuing education (CE) opportunities for human services workers requires existence of such CE offerings, participant access to the Internet, knowledge of the Internet's use, and willingness to enroll in such programs. A survey of human services professionals who attended the Family Preservation Annual Conferences in 2000 (N = 230) and 2002 (N = 197) revealed that 92% (n = 206) of 2000 survey participants and 98% (192) of 2002 survey participants have used the Internet, while 76% of 2000 and 56% of 2002 respondents reported no formal training in the use of the Internet and its features. Findings are reported that reveal substantial interest among subjects in the Internet as a medium for continuing education programs for professional development.

Introduction

Continuing professional development is probably more important now to Family Preservation (FP) workers than it has ever been. The amount of knowledge applicable to this complex field is exploding, changes in the FP and human services professions are happening quickly, and much of this new information is increasingly being disseminated over the Internet. Caseloads are growing rapidly as social service budgets are being cut in the face of rapidly increasing federal and local budget deficits, greatly reducing the amount of time and resources available for traveling to traditional Continuing Education (CE) events. As access to the Internet becomes increasingly available to the FP workforce at home and at their work-sites, CE on the Internet is becoming a feasible method for supplementing traditional face-to-face professional development approaches.

Literature Review

As society has moved from an industrial to an information base, adults rapidly have become involved in the use of the Internet for personal, educational, and professional purposes (Eastmond, 1998). It was reported that by 1997, over half of the full-time workforce in the United States used computers regularly on their jobs (DiNardo & Pischke, 1997). The percentage is no doubt much higher today. In addition, computers

are increasingly networked by local area networks and the Internet (Eastmond, 1998). Negroponte (1995) reported that quickly home computers are being connected to the Internet for information, communication, entertainment and education. With the current rate of information and knowledge building, workplaces are changing rapidly, placing new and increased demands on professionals to learn in nontraditional ways and to pursue professional development in order to secure upward mobility, new careers, and job security (Eastmond, 1998).

Distance Education is becoming accepted in the academic and professional communities as a means to provide greater access to both higher education and continuing professional education (Conklin & Osterndorf, 2000). Many educators believe and accept that the Internet is a future instructional medium that will soon rival the traditional classroom. (Schoech, 2000). Practitioners, who are required to stay current with the most up-to-date information and skills, rely on CE opportunities to gain the new information and skills they need (Conklin & Osterndorf, 2000). Virtual institutions have emerged to fill the need for greater access to educational experiences. It is clear that....."Technology is a train that stops for no one. It keeps moving whether you get onboard or not" (Karger & Levine, 1999, P. 312).

The human service professions have promoted life-long learning for the professional for decades (Petracchi & Morgenbesser, 1995; Leary, 2000). Many human service professions require on-going education to maintain standing within regulating organizations while concomitantly, it has become increasingly expensive to provide such educational events. At the same time, professional CE is in a state of change (Leary, 2000). Continuing professional education increasingly is being offered through distance and distributed learning formats requiring that educators involved in providing CE learn to intermingle traditional CE with technology (distributed formats) as well as create professional development opportunities offered exclusively on-line or through interactive television (Wisenberg & Willment, 2001). Technology presents limitless opportunities for the on-going education of helping professionals (Sattem, Reynolds, Bernhardt, & Burdeshaw, 2000). Yet the helping professions and human service educational programs have been slow to utilize technology and instructional innovation to provide continuing educational opportunities for practitioners (Burton & Seabury, 1999; Butterfield, 1998; Marson, 1997).

Most social work and human service educators have not embraced technology-based distance education with much enthusiasm (Siegel & Hennings, 1998). Because interaction and socialization are deemed paramount by most human service educators, distance education is viewed with caution (Krueger & Stretch, 2000). Regardless, distance education in social work education grew by about 5% between the years of

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1994-1996 (Siegel & Jennings, 1998). At present, most bachelor's and master's social work programs in large and public universities offer distance and distributed education. Most, however, are conducted using two-way interactive televised transmissions between a teacher at one site and students at other locations (Thyer, Polk, & Gauden, 1997). Overall, the use of technology in social work continuing education falls behind even that of traditional social work education (Petracchi & Morgenbesser, 1995).

Research on distance education in continuing education in human service professional programs is limited. The primary focus has been almost solely on social work practitioner education (Petracchi & Morganbesser, 1995). Additional literature on distance learning and continuing education has described model development rather than empirical efficacy (Jennings, Siegel, & Conklin, 1995). What research reports exist from both forms of social work education have concentrated on distance learning via two-way interactive television (ITV). Overall, live teaching was rated as more positive than ITV (Thayer, et al, 1997; Tyer & Artelt, 1998).

The Internet offers many unique features for distance learning not available in ITV (Giffords, 1998). It also increases access to professional knowledge unequaled by any other current educational methodology (1998). Researchers once envisioned and proposed the Internet as a resource for enrichment, a medium of collaboration, an international platform for expressions, and as a medium for participating in active learning (Relan & Gillani, 1997). The Internet has been used to engage in collaborative and cooperative learning in real instructional settings (e.g., Wan & Johnson, 1994; MayaQuest Expedition, 1999). In addition to learning content, adult learners in a web-based learning environment may engage in discussion, questioning, and problem solving with their teacher and other adult learners. The World Wide Web (WWW) particularly offers environments for group and team learning, critical to most human services CE. Greater access to instructors, peers, and learning resources are available to participants. Students are able to work in a collaborative manner on projects with others around the globe. Learning can expand beyond the traditional education offerings through the use of e-mail and discussion bulletin boards (Hillman, Willis & Gunawardera, 1994).

Social worker attitudes toward computers, lack of access to computers on the Internet, slow WWW connection speed, lack of knowledge of web-based resources, and the availability of Internet-related equipment and software may be factors affecting the use of information technology in the acquisition of continuing education credits (Peters & Romero, 1998). Yet diminishing budgets, mushrooming information and knowledge, and worker increases in caseloads all point to the need to quickly create on-line CE opportunities to supplement traditional venues (Barnett-Queen, 2001)

The significance of this study lies in its potential to develop distance and distributed learning CE opportunities for Family Preservation workers throughout the United States. Such development certainly would not undermine the importance of the face-to-face work the Family Preservation Institute currently provides but rather augment it to supply additional continuing education opportunities for its affiliates. In addition, providing such on-line CE events would allow for additional research to investigate the effectiveness of Internet-based distance learning as an instructional medium for continuing professional education.

Methods

Sample and Subjects Size

Sample

The Board of Directors of the Family Preservation Institute extended this investigator the opportunity to include the research instrument in the Family Preservation Conference packet. The packet was distributed to each attendee at the 2000 (N = 550) and 2002 (N = 460) annual conferences. At plenary sessions, conference attendees were encouraged to participate by the Family Preservation Institute Director, Alvin Sallee. Prospective participants were asked to complete the survey instrument and return it to the Conference Registration Desk prior to departing the Conference. In addition, opportunity was made for attendees to mail the completed survey to the investigator. A usable response rate of 54% (n = 230) was achieved from the 2000 conference and 46% (n = 197) from 2002. Approximately 5 surveys were unusable from each conference. A total of 427 completed surveys were used for this analysis.

Subjects

In consultation with the FPI Director, an effort was made to keep the survey instrument brief in order to maximize participation. As a result, few demographic questions were included. Details are presented in Table 1. Of note is the relative stability over the two-year period of the various demographic characteristics examined and the high percentage of participants under 50 years of age (80% in 2000; 73% in 2002). The FPI Director confirmed that the demographic characteristics of those participating in each survey roughly approximated the demographic make up of those in attendance during the respective conferences (A. Sallee, personal communication, July 14, 2003).

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Table 1. Demographics (N = 419)

2000 and 2002				
Gender	Female = 347 (81 %)	Male = 72 (17 %)	Missing = 8 (2 %)	
Age	Mean = 39 years	Range = 20 to 64 years		
2000 (n = 224; 53.5 %)				
Gender	Female = 188 (82 %)	Male = 36 (16 %)	Missing = 6 (2 %)	
Age	Mean = 38.4 years	Median = 37 years	Range = 20 to 63 years	
Age Ranges	20 – 29 years = 65 (28 %)	50 – 59 years = 36 (16 %)		
	30 – 39 years = 62 (27 %)	60 – 64 years = 6 (3 %)		
	40 – 49 years = 57 (25 %)			
Ethnicity	Asian	Native American	African American	Latino/Hispanic
	4 (2 %)	9 (4 %)	46 (20 %)	32 (14 %)
	Pacific Islander	White/Non-Hispanic	Other	Missing
	1 (< 1 %)	124 (54 %)	11 (5 %)	3 (1 %)
Work Setting	Juvenile Justice	Child Welfare	Mental Health	Schools
	11 (5 %)	154 (67 %)	15 (7 %)	1 (< 1 %)
	Other	Missing		
	43 (19 %)	6 (3 %)		
2002 (n = 195; 46.5 %)				
Gender	Female = 159 (81 %)	Male 36 (18 %)	Missing 2 (1 %)	
Age	Mean = 38,8 years	Median = 37 years	Range = 20 to 64 years	
Age Ranges	20 – 29 years = 48 (24 %)	50 – 59 years = 42 (21 %)		
	30 – 39 years = 60 (31 %)	60 – 63 years = 5 (3 %)		
	40 – 49 years = 36 (18 %)			
Ethnicity	Asian	Native American	African American	Latino/Hispanic
	2 (1 %)	9 (5 %)	29 (15 %)	39 (20 %)
	Pacific Islander	White/Non-Hispanic	Other	Missing
	0 (0 %)	115 (58 %)	2 (1 %)	1 (< 1 %)
Work Setting	Juvenile Justice	Child Welfare	Mental Health	Schools
	12 (6 %)	140 (71 %)	7 (4 %)	2 (1 %)
	Other	Missing		
	31 (16 %)	5 (3 %)		

One hundred seventy-nine (78%) of 2000 participants reported that they were required to get continuing education units (CEU) each year, while in 2002, 167 (85%) reported such a requirement. However, 208 (90%) in 2000 indicated freedom to self-select CEU events as did a similar percentage in 2002 (183; 93%). The high percentage required to get CEUs coupled with flexibility to self-select which CEU events to attend may indicate a potential market for Internet-based (as well as traditional face to face) CEUs provided by FPI.

Design

The research instrument was patterned after those used in two similar studies (Peters & Romero, 1998; Barnett-Queen, 2001). The study used a modified (by permission) version of their questionnaires. The survey was designed to investigate participant access to the Internet, typical use of Internet-based communication, and research tools and opinions regarding the use of computers and the Internet for professional continuing education (CE) purposes. The major differences between this study and the previous studies, apart from modification of the data collection instrument, were data collection method and sample choice. The earlier studies used variations of random sampling among licensed professional masters-level social workers in Texas (Peters and Romero, 1998) and bachelor's and master's-level social workers in New Mexico (Barnett-Queen, 2001). The previous studies used a mailed survey rather than data collection at a conference as in the current research. While the sample of the current study was substantially smaller (Texas study N = 16,000; New Mexico study N = 2700), the response rate was somewhat higher (Texas = 41%; New Mexico = 44%). In the current study, human services professional participants reported state of residence to be overwhelmingly Texas (2000 = 151, 66%; 2002 = 175, 89%).

Instrument

The data collection instrument contained four sections. The first section requested demographic as well as Internet access and Internet use behaviors. If participants reported use of the Internet, they were asked to complete the next two sections of the survey, which requested information regarding frequency of professional use of the Internet and Internet features. All participants were asked to complete the final section of the survey, which used a 5-point Likert-scale to inquire about opinions regarding use of the Internet to deliver professional CE events, likelihood of enrollment in such an event, and Internet-based CE topic preferences. The modified survey was field tested among social work undergraduate and graduate students as well as social work faculty. Minor adjustments were recommended, and most were incorporated into the instrument. The survey had no reliability or validity data at the time it was used.

Procedure

Data were collected by volunteers who attended the 2000 and/or 2002 Family Preservation (FP) Annual Conference. The survey was included in each conference attendee's general information packet, and subjects were encouraged, through announcements at plenary sessions, to complete the survey. Participants were asked to return completed surveys to the Registration Desk prior to departure from the FP Conference. They could also return the survey by U.S. mail.

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Results

General Internet Access and Recent Use

Internet Access and recent Internet Use data are reported in Table 2. A very high percentage of FP participants appeared to have access to computers and the Internet, and this phenomenon may be trending upward. If so, FP Conference participants certainly reflected the overall trend in the U.S. of Internet access and use. In addition, 24% (n = 56) who completed the survey in 2000 reported some type of formal training in the use of the Internet (e.g., in school, at work, commercial event, etc.), while 44% (n = 85) reported similar training in 2002. It would seem as computer and Internet use increase in all areas of society, increasingly FP Conferences will be made up of participants who have access, experience, and training in Internet use. While these data are inconclusive due to sample bias and limitations of the data collection instrument, they seem to encourage FP Conference to consider the inclusion of technology to accomplish the mission of FPI.

Table 2. Internet Access and Recent Use

Activity	**2000** (n = 230)		**2002** (n = 196)	
Computer at Home	Yes	No	Yes	No
	186 (81 %)	44 (19 %)	172 (87 %	24 (13 %)
Computer at Work	Yes	No	Yes	No
	210 (91 %)	20 (9 %)	191 (97 %)	5 (3 %)
		2000 (n = 229)		**2002** (n = 196)
Internet Access				
	Home Only	9 (4 %)		2 (1 %)
	Work Only	59 (26 %)		43 (22 %)
	Both	153 (67 %)		150 (77 %)
	Neither	8 (4 %)		1 (< 1 %)
	2000 (n = 224)		**2002** (n = 196)	
Used Internet at Either Location	Yes	No	Yes	No
	206 (92 %)	18 (8 %)	192 (98 %)	4 (2 %)

Internet Features Used Professionally

In a separate section of the survey, the Internet-users and projected users were asked to identify the rate at which they used specific Internet-related features both personally or professionally. The results of professional feature usage are summarized in Table 3. Note that those listed as providing "no answer" on Table 3 correspond to subjects self-identifying as non-users of the Internet. They were asked to skip this section of the

survey. Inquiry was made about the main features used to deliver typical distance education courses. It is noteworthy that over two-thirds of each group have used these primary features at some level.

Table 3. Internet Features Used Professionally

	Frequency/Month (%)							
Type	None	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	>21	Plan to	No Answer
2000 (n = 230)								
E-mail	7 (4)	22 (12)	21 (12)	10 (7)	19 (11)	89 (39)	12 (5)	50 (22)
FTP/Downloads	60 (38)	49 (31)	15 (10)	5 (3)	5 (3)	13 (8)	9 (6)	74 (32)
Search Engines	24 (14)	47 (28)	25 (15)	9 (5)	19 (11)	37 (22)	8 (5)	61 (26)
WWW Browsing	40 (24)	56 (34)	16 (10)	5 (3)	16 (10)	26 (16)	6 (3)	65 (28)
Bulletin Boards	100 (63)	30 (19)	7 (4)	1 (<1)	5 (3)	8 (5)	9 (6)	70 (30)
2002 (n = 197)								
E-mail	1 (<1)	14 (9)	11 (7)	9 (6)	12 (7)	110 (68)	5 (3)	35 (18)
FTP/Downloads	49 (36)	39 (29)	17 (12)	7 (5)	7 (5)	12 (9)	6 (4)	60 (31)
Search Engines	13 (9)	31 (20)	30 (20)	14 (9)	14 (9)	44 (29)	7 (4)	44 (22)
WWW Browsing	29 (21)	36 (25)	20 (14)	5 (4)	15 (11)	31 (22)	4 (3)	57 (29)
Bulletin Boards	82 (60)	30 (22)	3 (2)	4 (3)	4 (3)	9 (7)	5 (4)	60 (30)

Characteristics of Internet Users

Internet use among the participants of both 2000 and 2002 does not appear to be significantly associated with employment setting, whether or not one received formal training in its use or whether one has a computer at home, at work, or both. Gender was closely associated with Internet Use among the 2000 participants ($X^2 = 3.62$, $df = 1$, $p < .057$; *Cramer V = .129*) but not so among 2002 participants. Due to low cell frequencies in the 2000 analysis, a Fischer's Exact Test was used, and the variable Gender did not reach statistical significance in its association with Internet Use in either group. When the contingency tables were examined, it seemed the direction of the association was not surprising. It appeared that among 2000 participants, slightly more men used the Internet than might be expected and slightly fewer women.

When for analysis purposes subject ethnicity was collapsed into a dichotomous variable (White and Non-white), it was significantly associated with Internet use among the 2000 participants ($X^2 = 5.68$, $df = 1$, $p < .017$; *Cramer V = .164*). Ethnicity was not significantly associated with Internet use among the 2002 participants. Among the 2000

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survey's subjects, Whites reported using the Internet at a higher rate than did Non-Whites. This association between Ethnicity and Internet use collaborates findings in a similar previous investigation (Barnett-Queen, 2001).

A third finding of interest regarding demographic characteristics of Internet users, which may have achieved a significant association level in both groups had cell frequencies been higher, was Internet use by Age Range. The Age Range variable was created by grouping subject reported age into 10-year ranges beginning with ages 20 to 29. As might be expected, in each group, the lower age ranges had a higher percentage of Internet users than those in the older ranges. Details of this analysis are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Internet Use and Age Range

2000 (n = 220)	**Use the Internet**	**Do not use the Internet**
Age Range		
20-29	58 (26 %)	4 (2%)
30-39	60 (27 %)	1 (< 1 %)
40-49	50 (23 %)	5 (2 %)
50-59	32 (15 %)	4 (2 %)
60-69	4 (2 %)	2 (1 %)
Total	204 (93 %)	16 (7 %)
2002 (n = 190)	**Use the Internet**	**Do not use the Internet**
Age Range		
20-29	47 (25 %)	0 (0 %)
30-39	59 (31 %)	1 (< 1 %)
40-49	36 (19 %)	0 (0 %)
50-59	42 (22 %)	0 (0 %)
60-69	3 (2 %)	2 (1 %)
Total	187 (98 %)	3 (> 2 %)

% indicates % of total within Conference Year.

Internet Access

Employment setting, age range, Internet training, and gender were not significantly associated with subject reports on location of access to the Internet. While the association of the variables Internet Access with Internet Use seems apparent, it was interesting to find that in both the 2000 and 2002 groups the relationship was strongest when the subject reported having access to the Internet both at work and home. Participant data of Internet Access's relationship with Internet Use are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Internet Access and Internet Use

2000 (n = 223)		
	Internet Use	
	Yes	No
Internet Access		
Home Only	8 (4 %)	1 (< 1 %)
Work Only	47 (21 %)	10 (5 %)
Both	144 (65 %)	5 (2 %)
Neither	6 (3 %)	2 (1 %)
2002 (n = 195)		
	Internet Use	
	Yes	No
Internet Access		
Home Only	2 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Work Only	40 (21 %)	3 (< 2 %)
Both	149 (76 %)	0 (0 %)
Neither	0 (0 %)	1 (< 1 %)

Three additional variables were found to have important associations with the variable Internet Access in either both Conference groups or one group, each approaching significance, but due to low cell frequencies, the findings must be considered with caution. In addition to Ethnicity, subjects were asked both if a computer was personally owned and if a computer was in the workplace. As with Internet Use, among 2000 participants, whether or not the subject reported computer access to the Internet at dual locations (i.e., home and work) was closely associated with Ethnicity. Regardless of significance level, the non-White 2000 participants reported having less access to the Internet than did White participants. This finding collaborates results in a similar study

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(Barnett-Queen, 2001). Subject data of interest on Internet Access are reported in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Internet Access and Location of Subject Computer

2000 (n = 229)				
	Computer at Home		**Computer at Work**	
Internet Access	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Home Only	9 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	4 (2 %)	4 (2 %)
Work Only	21 (9 %)	38 (17 %)	53 (24 %)	6 (3 %)
Both	153 (67 %)	0 (0 %)	147 (65 %)	4 (2 %)
Neither	2 (1 %)	6 (3 %)	5 (2 %)	2 (1 %)
2002 (n = 195)				
Internet Access	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Home Only	2 (1 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (< 1 %)	0 (0 %)
Work Only	20 (10 %)	23 (12 %)	42 (22 %)	1 (< 1 %)
Both	148 (76 %)	1 (< 1 %)	146 (75 %)	4 (2 %)
Neither	1 (< 1 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (< 1 %)	0 (0 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

Table 7. Ethnicity and Internet Access

2000 (n = 215)		
	Non-White	**White**
Internet Access		
Home Only	4 (2 %)	5 (2 %)
Work Only	31 (14 %)	23 (11 %)
Both	51 (24 %)	93 (43 %)
Neither	6 (3 %)	2 (1 %)
2002 (n = 193)		
	Non-White	**White**
Internet Access		
Home Only	0 (0 %)	2 (1 %)
Work Only	20 (10 %)	21 (11 %)
Both	58 (30 %)	91 (47 %)

Neither	1 (< 1 %)	0 (0 %)

Attitudes toward Internet Use for Continuing Education

All participants were asked for opinions about whether required CEUs delivered on the Internet was a good idea and if such CEUs were available, given equipment availability, access to the Internet, and any necessary training, the likelihood of personal enrollment. In response to the inquiry about whether one favors putting required professional CEUs on the Internet, 142 (64%) of 2000 respondents agreed, while 33 (15%) were neutral, and 47 (21%) disagreed. The responses to the same question in 2002 were similar: 122 (63%) agreed, 34 (17%) were neutral, and 39 (20%) indicated it was not a good idea. When asked if under optimal circumstances would a research participant enroll in such CEU events, 60% (n = 133) of 2000 respondents indicated agreement, 16% (n = 35) had no opinion, and 24% (n = 52) reported no interest in enrollment. Likewise, in 2002, when research participants were asked the same question about Internet-based CEU enrollment, 59% (n = 114) indicated willingness to enroll, 19% (n = 37) were neutral, and 22% (n = 43) indicated no willingness to enroll.

The 5-choice Likert variables for subject attitudes toward putting CEUs on-line and enrolling in such CEUs were collapsed into 3 categories for analysis purposes (agree, neutral, disagree). The overall results indicated that about two-thirds (2000 = 61.7%; 2002 = 61.9%) of each year's conference attendees thought putting required CEUs on-line was a good idea and 57% of each year's participants indicated they would enroll in such CEUs. Again, one is struck by the consistency of responses across conference years.

Only the collapsed variable Ethnicity for the conference year 2002 was significantly associated with Opinions about CEUs on the Internet ($X^2 = 6.239$, $df = 2$, $p < .044$; *Cramer V = .180*). Upon examination of reported and expected cell frequencies (Table 8), the number of both Non-whites and Whites indicating agreement with putting CEUs online was much higher than expected. No other variables (e.g., Access to Internet, Gender, Age Range, etc.) were significantly associated with opinions about CEUs on the Internet or likelihood of enrollment in such CEUs. Subject data of interest of the Internet Use for Continuing Education variable are reported in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11.

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Table 8. Ethnicity and Internet-Based CEU Opinions

2000 (n = 208)			2002 (n = 206)		
CEUs on Internet	**Non-White**	**White**	**CEUs on Internet**	**Non-White**	**White**
Agree	54 (26 %)	77 (37 %)	Agree	58 (30 %)	63 (33 %)
Neutral	16 (8 %)	16 (8 %)	Neutral	10 (5 %)	23 (12 %)
Disagree	18 (9 %)	27 (13 %)	Disagree	11 (6 %)	27 (14 %)
			$X^2 = 6.239$, $df = 2$, $p < .044$; Cramer V = .180		
2000 (n = 208)			**2002 (n = 206)**		
Enroll in CEU	**Non-White**	**White**	**Enroll in CEU**	**Non-White**	**White**
Agree	52 (25 %)	69 (34 %)	Agree	51 (28 %)	62 (33 %)
Neutral	16 (8 %)	19 (9 %)	Neutral	13 (7 %)	23 (12 %)
Disagree	21 (10 %)	29 (14 %)	Disagree	14 (7 %)	28 (15 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

Table 9. Gender and Internet-Based CEU Opinion

2000 (n = 217)			2002 (n = 193)		
CEUs on Internet	**Female**	**Male**	**CEUs on Internet**	**Female**	**Male**
Agree	114 (53 %)	25 (12 %)	Agree	99 (51 %)	22 (11 %)
Neutral	26 (12 %)	7 (3 %)	Neutral	27 (14 %)	6 (3 %)
Disagree	43 (20 %)	2 (1 %)	Disagree	31 (16 %)	8 (4 %)
2000 (n = 215)			**2002 (n = 192)**		
Enroll in CEU	**Female**	**Male**	**Enroll in CEU**	**Female**	**Male**
Agree	108 (50 %)	21 (10 %)	Agree	94 (49 %)	19 (10 %)
Neutral	27 (13 %)	8 (4 %)	Neutral	27 (14 %)	9 (5 %)
Disagree	46 (21 %)	5 (2 %)	Disagree	35 (18 %)	8 (4 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

Table 10. Training in Use of Internet and Internet-Based CEU Opinions

2000 (n =184)	Training		2002 (n = 191)	Training	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
CEUs on Internet			**CEUs on Internet**		
Agree	37 (20 %)	81 (44 %)	Agree	54 (28 %)	65 (34 %)
Neutral	8 (4 %)	21 (11 %)	Neutral	15 (8 %)	19 (10 %)
Disagree	8 (4 %)	29 (16 %)	Disagree	15 (8 %)	23 (12 %)
2000 (n =182)	**Training**		**2002 (n = 190)**	**Training**	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Enroll in CEU			**Enroll in CEU**		
Agree	33 (18 %)	78 (43 %)	Agree	51 (27 %)	60 (32 %)
Neutral	10 (6 %)	23 (13 %)	Neutral	18 (10 %)	19 (10 %)
Disagree	9 (5 %)	29 (16 %)	Disagree	14 (7 %)	28 (15 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

Table 11. Age-Range and Internet-Based CEU Opinion

2000 (n = 218)	CEUs on Internet			Enroll in CEUs		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Age Range						
20-29 Years	42 (19 %)	9 (4 %)	13 (6 %)	39 (18 %)	11 (5 %)	14 (7 %)
30-39 Years	33 (15 %)	13 (6 %)	15 (7 %)	32 (15 %)	11 (5 %)	17 (8 %)
40-49 Years	34 (16 %)	6 (3 %)	11 (5 %)	33 (15 %)	5 (2 %)	13 (6 %)
50-59 Years	26 (12 %)	4 (2 %)	6 (3 %)	23 (11 %)	5 (2 %)	7 (3 %)
60-69 Years	5 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (< 1 %)	5 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (< 1 %)
2002 (n = 189)	**CEUs on Internet**			**Enroll in CEUs**		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Age Range						
20-29 Years	29 (15 %)	9 (5 %)	10 (5 %)	26 (14 %)	10 (5 %)	12 (6 %)
30-39 Years	36 (19 %)	14 (7 %)	9 (5 %)	29 (15 %)	16 (9 %)	14 (7 %)
40-49 Years	22 (12 %)	5 (3 %)	8 (4 %)	23 (12 %)	3 (2 %)	8 (4 %)
50-59 Years	27 (14 %)	6 (3 %)	9 (5 %)	30 (16 %)	5 (3 %)	7 (4 %)
60-69 Years	5 (3 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	4 (2 %)	1 (< 1 %)	0 (0 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

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Topics for Internet CEU Events

Survey respondents each year indicated preferences for potential topics for on-line CEU events. Participants were given 4 topics from which to choose as well as space on the survey to submit write-in topics. Survey data on potential topics of interest for Internet CEU events are reported in Table 12.

Table 12. Topic Preferences for Internet-Based CEU Events

Conference Year / Topic	2000 (n = 224)		2002 (n = 196)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Administration	77 (34 %)	147 (66 %)	64 (33 %)	132 (67 %)
Supervision	98 (44 %)	126 (56 %)	76 (39 %)	120 (61 %)
Direct Practice	140 (63 %)	84 (37 %)	118 (60 %)	78 (40 %)
Ethics	137 (61 %)	87 (39 %)	112 (57 %)	84 (43 %)

% are within Conference Year's category.

Discussion and Application

Independent variables central to this study, along with important dependent variables associated with interest in the Internet as a method for obtaining professional CE were put into logistic regression models to determine if any were predictive. Unfortunately, with samples of these sizes, too many low frequency and empty cells prevented meaningful findings.

Most FP respondents reported access to the Internet. Approximately 99% (n = 227) reported such access in 2000 and 99% (n = 195) at the 2002 FP Conference. Reports of use of the Internet were at similar levels. Among all 2000 survey participants, 206 (92%) reported having used the Internet and in 2002 192 (98%). Compared to other similar studies among human service professionals, FP Conference participants appear to have greater access and higher use of the Internet than did licensed social workers in Texas and New Mexico. Barnett-Queen (2001) reported that 87% of respondents (licensed bachelor's and master's-level social workers in New Mexico) had access to the Internet at home, work, or both and that 71% indicated use of the Internet for personal or professional purposes. The Texas study of licensed social workers (Peters & Romero, 1998) did not inquire about access to the Internet, but only 44% of their respondents reported use of the Internet for personal or professional reasons. It seems probable that if these studies were replicated in 2002, rates would be higher; however, even when the New Mexico study's (2001) findings are compared with the 2000 FP results, the earlier study's Internet usage rates lagged behind slightly.

Training in the use of the Internet rose sharply among respondents from the 2000 to the 2002 inquiry. In 2000, FP attendees reported that 24% (n = 56) had received some type of formal training in the use of the Internet. However, in the 2002 investigation, 44% (n = 85) reported having received such training. While the Texas study (1998) did not investigate this variable, 39% of New Mexico licensed social workers (2001) who participated in a similar study reported receiving training in the use of the Internet. While one cannot draw firm conclusions about this upward trend in training, it would seem reasonable to expect that as the Internet becomes used more widely in public and private education, more and more FP attendees, in the future, will have participated in some type of Internet educational activity. Anticipating such experiences might point toward the need for FPI to further integrate the use of technology in the pursuit of its CE mission.

Among the limited demographic variables on which data were collected in the two FP studies, three surfaced as important descriptors of Internet Users. Among 2000 respondents, Gender, while not rising to the level of statistical significance, seemed to be an important variable. A higher rate of males (n = 36; 100%) reported using the Internet for professional or personal purposes than did females (n = 166; 91%). However, 2002 findings revealed greater equality between the sexes. In 2002, female respondents used the Internet at a higher rate than males and their 2000 counterparts (n = 156; 99%) while male reported use slipped to 94% (n = 34). While the rate changes were not great from year to year, it is important to note that among FP conference attendees, there does not appear to be a digital divide between females and males. Reports among Texas and New Mexico licensed social workers indicated similar rates of use between females and males (Peters & Romero, 1998; Barnett-Queen, 2001).

Like the findings reported among New Mexico licensed social workers (Barnett-Queen, 2001), Ethnicity was found to be significantly associated with Internet Use among the FP 2000 survey participants. Whites reported using the Internet at a significantly higher level than did other ethnic groups when examined as a whole. Ninety-six percent (n = 115) of White FP participants in 2000 reported Internet Use whereas 88% (n = 79) of Non-white participants indicated such use. In 2002 the rates between the two ethnic groups were: 96% (n = 76) of Non-white respondents reported Internet Use as did 99% (n = 113) of Whites. Even though the same association was not found among 2002 FP participants, it seems these findings suggest that if FPI decided to deliver some CEU events on the Internet, being sensitive to the possible discrepancy in Internet Use among ethnic minorities would be prudent.

The third important demographic characteristic of Internet Users in this study was Age-Range (Table 4). While not statistically significant due to low numbers in each sample,

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both participant groups showed strong evidence that higher rates of Internet Use exist among the younger conference attendees who participated in the study. If the trend holds, as time goes on, as indicated by other variable descriptions, the use of the Internet by FP conference attendees will become ubiquitous. This evidence would seem to lend itself to the argument that FPI should consider the use of technology in general and the Internet in specific as one set of media for accomplishing its CE mission.

Internet Access appears to be another variable FPI should attend to among ethnic groups if it attempts to use the Internet as a delivery method for CEU offerings. As reported in Table 7, in both data collection groups (i.e., 2000 and 2002), Non-whites reported lower rates of access to the Internet overall than did Whites. While this association did not rise to the level of statistical significance in either year as it did in the New Mexico social worker study (2001), considering how to address the possible discrepancy if FPI decides to venture into on-line CEU offerings would be prudent. As with New Mexico licensed social workers, in order to successfully meet the professional education needs of constituents, steps should be taken to address the disparity of Internet Access.

As in the previous studies, a strong majority of FP participants in 2000 and 2002 favored using the Internet to deliver professional CE opportunities. Approximately two-thirds of all respondents indicated a favorable opinion for such offerings. While a slightly lower rate, 57% of the two surveys' participants showed enough interest in on-line CEU events that given access, training, and equipment, they would enroll in such events. It is quite interesting, when considered in light of possible limited ethnic minority access to the Internet, that this study found a significant statistical relationship between Ethnicity (dichotomous variable) and opinions about offering professional development opportunities on-line. Non-white FP participants in the 2002 data collection (as well as Whites) were found to have higher rates of agreement with doing so than might be expected (Table 8). This finding further augments the need to address possible discrepancies of the FP constituency if the Internet is ventured into as a delivery method for CEUs.

Since most FP constituents appear to have Internet Access and to have used the Internet for professional or personal reasons, and given the level of interest expressed in the 2000 and 2002 surveys, there seems to be support in this organization for the development of professional development opportunities delivered on-line. It seems reasonable to argue from these findings, especially since they are widely supported by the findings of the Texas (Peters & Romero, 1998) and New Mexico (Barnett-Queen, 2001) studies among social workers, that FPI and its Board of Directors should actively pursue offering a limited number of CEU opportunities that utilize the Internet as a delivery method. Given the relative Internet-technology sophistication of its affiliates, and that its conference

participants come from vast regions of the country, venturing into on-line continuing education may be worth the effort. Any such efforts should be accompanied by forms of distance education skills training to increase the likelihood of enrollment and completion of such on-line events. Further, efforts should be made to support FPI constituents' access to on-line continuing education. While such events should not be offered to supplant the FP Annual Conference, they should be undertaken to support and extend the efforts made by FPI to achieve its professional development mission among family preservation workers.

Recommendations for Future Research

As recommended in 2001 (Barnett-Queen), future research needs to focus on three major issues. Larger samples would raise the validity and importance of findings of future studies in this area. Similar studies among FP Conference attendees should attempt to obtain higher participation rates. And finally, efforts should be made to standardize the data collection instrument in order to increase its validity and reliability as a data collection device. In addition, additional knowledge is to be gained by future studies focusing on topics preferred for CEUs on the Internet and what design issues need to be addressed to make such educational opportunities as user-friendly as possible. Finally, an investigation of those who indicated CEUs on the Internet is not a good idea could be useful: what reservations they have might prove instructive to future CEU development.

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