

Premier Conferences Rise to the Top

Marci Powell

“Close your eyes. You’re getting sleepy. You’re eyelids are getting very heavy.” What do a hypnotist, the USDLA President, and Julie Young, Executive Director of Florida Virtual Schools, have in common? They were all keynote speakers at the recent TxDLA Annual Conference held in Galveston the last week of March. The Texas Distance Learning Association is one of the largest state

chapters under the United States Distance Learning Association.

This year’s theme at TxDLA’s conference was “Surfing the Big Wave.” Those involved in distance learning know that the ride can sometimes be rough, the waters are often deep, and it is crucial to have the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate through this constantly evolving field. One of the premier distance learning conferences in the country, TxDLA, provided opportunity to gain knowledge and skills while capturing practitioners’ attention with their healthy lineup of more than 100 breakout, showcase, roundtable, and how-to sessions.

Hypnotist Tom DeLuca made the opening session memorable. Taking attendees on a trip through the “Theatre of the Imagination,” Tom wove together the light-hearted fun of a comedy show with a motivational message. Innovation can only come from the imagination, and Tom DeLuca’s hypnosis performance demonstrated just how innovative people can be when they are relaxed and free of pressure. Tom was able to get volunteers to break through mental barriers by allowing them to use their own creativity to fuel the show.

USDLA President Darcy Hardy, also Assistant Vice Chancellor for

Academic Affairs of the University of Texas System, and Director of the UT TeleCampus, delivered an “Introduction of Five Pillars Concept” while serving as the moderator for a panel sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Panelists included Tana Bishop of University of Maryland University College; Ron Brey, Associate VP for Instructional Resources and Technology at Austin Community College; and Karen Swan, Research Center for Educational Technology at Kent State University. The keynote session addressed how to meet quality standards for learning and cost effectiveness and examined what reasonable benchmarks and milestones define accomplishments. Using the Sloan Consortium’s Five Pillars of Quality Online Education as a frame for panel and audience discussion, the session put primary emphasis on learning, faculty satisfaction, and student satisfaction.

Julie Young served as the closing keynoter, speaking on “Redefining Education: Riding the Wave of the Future.” As Young noted, “In our current system, time is the constant and achievement the variable. We have it backwards. Achievement should be the constant and time the variable.” Citing the 1992 SCANS



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Report, Young examined the need for the United States to explore new models of learning. "Given the societal changes in our 21st-century work and family environments, coupled with the changing expectations of today's students, we must stand ready to redesign education as we know it. The new generation of learners are living in the digital age, yet existing in an educational institution designed around an agricultural timetable in an industrial setting," she said. Young emphasized that educational models that design and organize teaching and learning around the needs of the student, not the institution, will be the wave of the future.

While the keynote sessions were truly outstanding, the other jam-packed sessions and activities were invigorating, intense, and provided highly beneficial information. Sessions not only addressed distance learning issues for K-12, higher education, healthcare, government, and corporate applications, but also focused on technical and administrative issues. Attendees left the conference with valuable resources and peer networking to tap into throughout the year.

If you didn't have the privilege of having your imagination free to release innovation at the hypnotic TxDLA conference, don't worry. Numerous conferences are on the horizon over the next few months.

Depending on what type of distance learning you are embracing, such as online, videoconferencing, satellite, or blended learning, several conferences rise to the top as premier opportunities for gaining valuable information and resources.

Among the top-quality conferences, both nationally and internationally, are the International Forum for Women in E-Learning Conference (<http://www.usdla.org/html/events/ifwe/>), the Keynote conference (www.K12videoconf.org), and the Online Learning Conference & Expo. Further information about these and other conferences may be found at the USDLA Website: <http://www.usdla.org/html/events/conferences.htm>.

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