



Innovating AECT

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In 2016, AECT's past president Kay Persichitte wrote about an AECT parable describing the fictitious rebirth of eagles (Persichitte, 2016). The eloquent idea of sacrifice and radical change to survive was suggested by Persichitte as the kinds of things AECT was undergoing at that time, including branding changes, growth, international expansion, financial management, and more. I think we might all agree that the significant changes we see around us in AECT currently would rival any time in our history, other than either our transition from the AVI and DAVI days when we moved from a government agency to a non-profit free-standing organization, or the move from Washington, DC to Bloomington. In this column, I'd like to address our innovations as seen through the convention and share some thoughts for our new partnerships and where we go from here. During my "pitch" speech when I ran for AECT President, I discussed the importance of new partnerships, reaching out to make our association increasingly relevant and connected. This column offers an opportunity to focus on these innovations and new partnerships.

First, we made history! We should all be incredibly proud of the work we accomplished in Chicago in November 2021. Those of you who attended, numbering nearly 1000, must know that you are a part of history. We had 346 concurrent sessions, and more than 200 poster, roundtable and showcase sessions. We pulled off a truly hybrid convention and with very few glitches! This involved making sure the technology worked well for sessions to be heard and seen around the world as well as in Chicago, recording sessions for viewing in different time zones, extending our program into the evenings to accommodate time differences, and bringing a flock of Owls (video conferencing tools) to Chicago to facilitate hybrid sessions. Congratulations to all who participated, planned, organized, and formed this historic convention; you

have my deep appreciation. It was an amazing time to welcome AECT home.

During the convention there were several important moments that I thought were worth not only sharing here, but also reflecting on as a leader in our organization. During our opening keynote, we heard from IEEE ICICLE (Industry Consortium on Learning Engineering), The US Department of Defense, and The Association of Public & Land grant universities (APLU) about potential new partnerships with AECT. In addition to the opening Keynote, we welcomed publishing outlets that represent new partnerships such as *E-Learn* magazine, *The Conversation*, *Times Higher Education*, *EDUCAUSE*, and our own *Interactions* outlet. All of these partnerships and new connections are just the beginning. Our HERO's awards across k-12, higher education, and performance technology practitioners highlighted partnerships that feed our research to practice goals.

During my comments at the membership meeting, I shared some concerns about our relevance and proper connections to those who can help spread our message. I shared my perspective that AECT offers the most important collection of educational technology experts speaking on issues of hyper-relevance today. We have a role to play in the future of learning in all contexts which has become increasingly important with the changes consequent to the twin pandemics of COVID and racism. But I'm concerned that we are too often left behind, and I discussed my struggle to understand why. I wondered about perceptions others may have of our association How do those in SITE, ISTE, or other professional association cousins see us? What do NSF, the Department of Education, and other funders say about us? Do those outside of our organization see us as both highly productive and self-possessed, but also as a place that is built around "academic stars" bound up in internal politics?

A rather surprising thing happened at the convention this year, we forgot to pack the "ribbons." You all probably know these ribbons—they come in an array of rainbow colors emblazoned in gold with identifiers like "Board Member", "Past President", "Presenter", or "Student." When registering, I asked about whether I needed any ribbons and was

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told they were forgotten back in Bloomington. I worried that members would be very unhappy about this, but I secretly hoped that others might agree with me that ribbons only serve to divide us. Do things like status, titles, institutions, and rankings distinguish some while making others feel less important? Could these small things discourage innovation and connection? I pondered during my address to the members that perhaps if we humbly set aside those things that divide us, we could dramatically change the world. I encouraged our members to join together as a community. And now I am happy to repeat this invitation. We need to be kind and patient with each other. Rather than dimming others' accomplishments so ours will shine brighter, we need to help make every link in our chain the strongest it can be. I believe we can chart a path toward a more relevant, cooperative, and expansive AECT.

In our closing keynote AECT leaders opened the floor to further explore what it means to “Innovate AECT.” There were a wide variety of very smart questions—what else would we expect from our members? Our conversation ranged from how we were innovating in our own practices to all the ways that we have been changing within AECT itself.

It has been a remarkably revolutionary time in our organization, as well as in our field. Between the twin pandemics, the changes in leadership, and the sudden prominence of online learning and educational technology tools, it has been a time of change. Among the goals that we have heard during open listening sessions with members, board members, and those willing to lend their voices to the Executive Director search process, we have heard the importance of transparency, inclusion, care, and breaking down hierarchies and status. As a result, we have opened committee membership through an open call to all members that I hope will become our default practice. We are in the process of posting our financial information, meeting minutes, committee membership, leadership information, and updates on things like the Executive Director search online for all members

to review (remember you'll need to log into your account to have access). I have decided to open an office hour each week to those who would like to have my ear on Friday mornings from 9–10 EST on a regular basis (find the Zoom link in an upcoming News & Notes email). Of course, all of your AECT leadership is available via email and we always look forward to hearing from you.

I'd like to end on another positive note here. We funded 29 members, both students and professionals from our fundraising and foundation to attend the Chicago convention! And we are just getting started with our fundraising efforts. If you're willing to help, if you've been able to continue to work uninterrupted this past two years, if you've been able to remain financially stable, we encourage you to share your good fortune with others by contributing to the Foundation, who is administering the scholarship and professional development grants at <https://aect-foundation.square.site/> We are excited and looking forward to increased cooperation and collaboration with the foundation arm of our organization.

Thank you all for a fantastic homecoming! I had a great time at the dance and can't wait to see what the year ahead will bring. I also can't wait to see you all in 2022 in Las Vegas where our focus will be on “Impacting Student Learning.”

Ali Carr-Chellman

2021–2022 AECT President

Reference

Persichette, K. (2016). Rebirth. *TechTrends*, 60, 304.

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