



POD Network News

The POD Network's Role in Advocacy

The POD Network's bylaws describe a tripartite purpose for the organization: to provide support and service to members; to offer resources to others interested in educational development; and to fulfill an advocacy role. Recently, POD leadership has engaged in discussions related to the last purpose frequently, with statements archived [here](#). Due to this increasing exigency, a key focus of the fall Core Committee (Executive Board) meeting was our advocacy efforts. As representatives for our approximately 1400 members, Core members asked: does our current definition of advocacy still effectively frame our work? What deliberative process should we use to generate statements on behalf of the organization? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how can we be proactive to affirm the key role we play in advancing teaching and learning?

At the Fall 2017 Core meeting, we had a rich discussion on the POD Network's bylaws as they define advocacy. The discussion focused on a proposal co-drafted by the [Executive Committee](#) and [External Partnerships and Outreach Committee \(EPOC\)](#). As an outcome, Core approved an expanded definition of advocacy for the organization, defining it as "intentional efforts to have the POD Network be visible and represented at conversations and decisions related to educational development" and "statements of support, concern, or endorsement of a particular position that proactively or reactively address the organization's [mission](#), one or more of POD Network's values, or significantly impact the work of the vast majority of members."

The second part of the discussion focused on a process for issuing statements on behalf of the POD Network. (Up to this point, we did not have a formal process, although Core and Executive Committee did approve all previously issued statements.) This proposal was guided by a *Chronicle of Higher Education* [article](#) written by the president of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. The piece thoughtfully lays out guiding questions for leaders to consider when issuing statements on behalf of an organization, which we applied to the POD Network:

- **Who is the POD Network?** Our organization represents multiple constituencies, and indeed, "diverse perspectives" is a [core value](#) that stands along "advocacy." As a diverse community, there should be consideration that some issues are part of active public debate in educational development (e.g., the role of student

ratings). We do not want an organizational statement to stifle healthy discussions and further, we do not seek to bring about undue division within our own professional community.

- **Does the issue directly affect the organization's mission, values, or the work of the vast majority of members?** The POD Network will focus its advocacy on these targeted issues. We also need to consider that POD is a non-profit educational development organization, not a partisan one.
- **Does a statement represent a way to truly advocate for our members, to support our colleagues, and to speak on an issue where POD's voice is unique and truly needed?** The bar for approval of any statement on behalf of the POD Network should be high. We should not issue statements frequently, or they will lose their power. Similarly, an organizational statement may not always be the best way to advocate for an issue.

As a result of a robust discussion about these guidelines, the Core Committee approved a process for issuing statements, which you can read in the POD Network's updated [Governance Manual](#).

The first implementation of this process came with the POD Network's response to a series of reports issued by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' (AAAS) Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education. The POD Network response was multi-textured and will lead, I think, to promising new spaces to highlight our members' leadership in educational change efforts:

- Working in collaboration with the Network of STEM Education Centers, the POD Network issued [a statement](#), calling for closer collaboration in future efforts and supplementing the report with additional information about how our members do and can support the recommendations made in [the report](#).
- POD Network leadership also has spoken at AAAS events and with AAAS staff members several times. We are gratified by their responsiveness, and we look forward to continued conversations about ways we can correct missing information in the reports to provide a more accurate, evidence-based picture of our field.

As proactive measures, we are working to include on our website two valuable resources, which we will document the breath and impact of our field. First, we plan to compile a repository of Centers for Teaching and Learning, working with [the valuable list](#) developed by the University of Kansas's Center for Teaching Excellence and our

own member records. It is critical that we document the growing number of people and centers engaged in the work of educational development.

Second, there is a new [POD Speaks](#) to respond to the claim that there is no rigorous literature connecting educational development and student learning. Certainly, the intended outcomes of our work are many — including the value of professional development in and of itself — but demonstrated impact on student learning is frequently called for in today's higher education environment.

Finally, and most encouragingly, we have seen these organizational efforts result in individual POD members' empowerment to engage in their own advocacy on behalf of their center or the field. For example, I have heard from a CTL director at a Commission member's campus who extended an invitation to coffee to discuss how CTLs are powerful partners in educational change. I have heard from multiple POD members who plan to write blog posts on the issue. Finally, I hope that others will adapt and modify the template we provided in our December 8 email to members (available [here](#)) to reach out to [Commission members](#) or [AAAS members](#) on your campus. **We are strengthened by your efforts.**

This is my last column as POD Network President. It has been a privilege.

Take care,
Mary

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