

Reimagining the Council of University Chairs of Obstetrics and Gynecology in evolving times



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The history of the Council of University Chairs of Obstetrics and Gynecology

The Council of University Chairs of Obstetrics and Gynecology (CUCOG) began as a formal Department Chairs Committee within the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO). Proud of its origins as part of our premier educational organization, department chairs recognized the need for a separate organization to provide resources for US and Canadian obstetrics and gynecology department chairs in supporting excellence across the academic missions. CUCOG became an independent organization in 1995 with liaison activities with the American Association of Medical Colleges, APGO, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). As stated in its bylaws, CUCOG aims to support leadership development in obstetrics and gynecology and promote and encourage excellence in medical student, resident, and fellowship training; clinical practice; and research and advocacy in women's health.

Historically, CUCOG consisted of 4-member categories. Regular members included obstetrics and gynecology department chairpersons within US schools of medicine. Affiliate members included chairpersons who had a faculty appointment with one of the US medical schools and a fully accredited residency program or students in the medical school's department. Canadian members included obstetrics

and gynecology department chairpersons in Canadian medical schools. Emeritus members included former CUCOG members.

In general, CUCOG organized an annual meeting for its members and invited guests, initially in conjunction with APGO and the Council on Resident Education in Obstetrics and Gynecology and now with ACOG. The program consisted of topics of relevance to managing an academic department of obstetrics and gynecology. CUCOG organized a chair's course for over a decade, which was designed to provide leadership training specifically for new chairs.

Developing a strategic plan for the 21st century

In 2016, CUCOG solicited input from its membership to consider the areas where CUCOG could be most helpful. Common themes emerged, including providing resources for professional development for chairs and improved finance skills and developing a stronger chair voice in advocacy for women's health, training, and research. The emerging role of non—university-based obstetrics and gynecology departments in education and training and the need to coordinate with other societies drove the need to ensure our continued relevance to CUCOG members. Motivated to put these themes and issues into a more formal structure, the CUCOG Board of Directors decided to develop its first strategic plan in 2019. Although we had emphasized the importance of strategic planning to our members and conducted sessions at annual meetings devoted to best practices for departmental strategic planning as an organization, we had never conducted the process ourselves.

CUCOG selected Avenue M, an organization with previous experience with obstetrics and gynecology professional organizations, to lead its strategic planning. A process that included individual interviews and committee teleconferences culminated in a 1-day retreat planned immediately before the 2020 annual meeting. Participants included the current CUCOG Board of Directors, select previous leaders, and 10 representative members. These members were selected for individual (age, gender, race and ethnicity, subspecialty, and tenure as chair) and departmental (region, size, national prominence, and private vs state) diversity. Representatives from nonuniversity departments, who were affiliate CUCOG members under bylaws in effect at the time, were also included.

During the initial strategic planning process, several pivotal events occurred that both modified the process and influenced the strategic plan. The events after the murder of George Floyd emphasized the need to fully integrate diversity,

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CUCOG develops a new strategic plan in response to evolving challenges in the departments of obstetrics and gynecology.

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FIGURE

The 2021 Council of University Chairs of Obstetrics and Gynecology strategic plan

VISION		A diverse, inclusive and cohesive community of OB-GYN chairs advancing women's health		
MISSION		Support OB-GYN Chairs' leadership and professional development through networking and sharing of best practices to ensure our department's clinical and academic success.		
Goals and Objectives	1	1.1	1.2	1.3
	Empower chairs to advance department excellence	Collect and disseminate information on trends likely to impact women's health & OB/GYN department operations	Modernize the sharing & delivery of information	Create opportunities for members to address critical issues in women's health & department management & leadership
		1.4	1.5	1.6
		Collaborate with a broad spectrum of partners focused on women's health to identify & act on trends impacting department operations	Engage in and partner with other organizations in advocacy efforts to promote women's health	Share best practices & resources for achieving academic goals
	2	2.1	2.2	2.3
	Advance diversity, equity and inclusive excellence in women's health	Recognize and promote the contributions & achievements of diverse communities in addressing departmental challenges	Lead by providing safe, respectful spaces within departments for diverse voices & perspectives to be shared & heard	Leverage our positions as department chairs to promote values and best practices to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion within department and for department's patients
		2.4	2.5	
		Ensure the departmental agenda includes continuing work on elimination of health inequities	Engage in & partner with other organizations in advocacy efforts to promote diversity, equity & inclusive excellence	
	3	3.1	3.2	3.3
	Promote, identify, develop, and educate current and future chairs and department leaders	Create and disseminate resources for current chairs to develop future leaders.	Identify and create clear pathways to academic leadership for members of groups underrepresented in medicine	Provide leadership, management, & professional development for chairs
		3.4	Share best practices for faculty development	

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equity, and inclusion (DEI) into every aspect of our strategic plan. The COVID-19 pandemic began, requiring the cancellation of the in-person retreat, replaced by a series of teleconference meetings. The organization began frequent COVID-19— and DEI-related teleconferences, which emphasized the benefits of expanding our organizational activities beyond our annual meeting and incorporating virtual technologies. A consultant with DEI expertise was engaged to help integrate DEI into our strategic plan.

Council of University Chairs of Obstetrics and Gynecology's 2021 strategic plan

The final strategic plan (Figure) was approved by the CUCOG Board of Directors and presented at the 2021 CUCOG annual meeting, and implementation started in 2022. The new vision for CUCOG is to have a diverse, inclusive, and cohesive community of obstetrics and gynecology department chairs advancing women's health. The revised mission for CUCOG is to support obstetrics and gynecology department chairs' leadership and professional development through networking and sharing of best practices to ensure the departments' clinical and academic success. Below are the key goals that were identified.

1. Empower chairs to advance department excellence

Keeping the cohort of department chairs informed on the best practices of leading departments and the current issues influencing departments is a key CUCOG objective under this goal. Efforts are ongoing to make certain that CUCOG has an updated list of its current obstetrics and gynecology department chairs and to recruit those chairs who are not currently CUCOG members.

In addition to its annual meeting, CUCOG plans to initiate a regularly scheduled member newsletter and conduct webinars on emerging issues influencing departments, a medium that was first instituted to help chairs deal with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently the Dobbs decision reversing *Roe v Wade*. A communications committee and an education committee have been established to further guide the implementation of these goals.

2. Advance diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence in women's health

To promote inclusivity, CUCOG has made amendments to its bylaws to consolidate membership from 4 to 2 categories. Specifically, all chairpersons who have a faculty appointment within a medical school in the United States and Canada and who have

either a fully accredited residency program or students in the medical school's department will be considered regular members. The affiliate member and Canadian member categories have been eliminated. The emeritus member category remains.

CUCOG will develop educational resources focused on recruiting and retaining faculty and developing the career of faculty, particularly from underrepresented groups. Moreover, CUCOG plans to ensure content related to individuals underrepresented in medicine, and healthcare disparities are included in all communication and education efforts.

Lastly, CUCOG will continue to partner with our professional organizations to raise awareness of healthcare disparities and injustices in women's health. The collective voice of obstetrics and gynecology department chairs in CUCOG should provide a strong advocacy voice. For example, CUCOG partnered with ACOG as coplaintiffs in the mifepristone risk evaluation and mitigation system case and joined in several other multiple advocacy sign-ons.

3. Promote, identify, develop, and educate current and future chairs and department leaders

Identifying and developing recently appointed and future department chairs and leaders are a crucial CUCOG goal,

given the ever-greater complexities of directing an obstetrics and gynecology department of obstetrician-gynecologists. CUCOG plans to create a blueprint and materials for onboarding new chairs and collate resources for current chairs to develop future leaders.

New chairs have the option to consider training programs, such as the Harvard Program for Chairs of Clinical Services. Such programs are very useful but are expensive and require a multiple-week commitment. A 1 day, relatively inexpensive chair's course will continue to be organized by CUCOG to provide new and potential chairs obstetrics-and-gynecology-specific training by more experienced obstetrics and gynecology department chairs.

Conclusion

The CUCOG has a long history of building a community among obstetrics and gynecology department chairs. Its newly developed strategic plan and key goals will enable further empowerment of current and future department leaders to build departments well positioned to address the pressing health needs of women, train the next generation of women's health clinicians, and build infrastructures to answer important research questions in women's health. ■