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Keeping it Current: Avenues for Staff Development

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Keeping it Current: Avenues for Staff Development

Brooks Library at Central Washington University

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Why Have Professional Development?

Finding time in our busy schedules and lives can be half the battle to making professional development happen. Why is professional development worth the investment of time and effort?
- Creates a community of learning and a means of exploring areas of professional interest
- Good for morale as staff will feel more confident in their abilities when provided with training and learning new skills, methods, theories, and technologies
- Creates an environment where professional development and reflection is a regular part of staff activities and position expectations
- Demonstrates an investment in your employees that will likely result in a more efficiently operating library

Step 1: Assessing Needs, Identifying Skills

Choosing an Effective Format
Assessment comes in a variety of forms and flavors, and it's important to choose something that will work for your institution and your work environment.

Tools & Approaches
- Informal Conversation (this can be effective in one-on-one conversations or small groups, can get unwieldy in larger staff meetings where it's harder to get everyone's opinions)
- Formalized Surveys
- Observation
- Suggestion Box (maintaining a formalized way of collecting suggestions provides an opportunity for people to consider it continuously)

Identify Staff Strengths
- Identifying staff strengths recognizes and encourages the sharing of personal expertise
- Allows you to collaborate within your library to share the abilities, strengths, and skills of employees for the overall benefit of the library

Focus & Direction
You don't have to do everything at once! Once you've conducted a needs assessment, you can start determining where to focus.

Case Study: Library Instruction

Purpose of Needs Assessment
With the establishment of new instruction initiatives and expectations at Brooks Library, it was important to assess the comfort level of teaching librarians with regard to various instruction elements.

Methods
Librarians who delivered library instruction were asked to complete a survey with questions about their comfort level with instruction concepts, practices, etc. These responses would be used to compile a plan of action on what areas of library instruction would be a focus for faculty development.

Example Question: Please rank these topics by your interest level

#	Question	Indifferent	Somewhat Interested	Very Interested	Total Responses	Mean
12	Using libguide software	2	1	9	12	2.58
13	Reaching out to departments/ setting up instruction	2	1	9	12	2.58
4	In-class assessment	0	4	8	12	2.67
3	Writing outcomes	1	3	8	12	2.58
6	Lesson planning	2	3	7	12	2.42
7	Engaging your audience?	1	4	7	12	2.50
9	Case-based learning	3	2	6	11	2.27
14	Working with courses taught online	1	6	5	12	2.33
8	Using your space (room design)	1	6	5	12	2.33
5	Using humor in the classroom	1	7	4	12	2.25
10	Classroom games	2	6	4	12	2.17
11	How to say it	4	5	3	12	1.92
1	Coping with a classroom in a crisis	3	6	3	12	2.00
2	Body language in the classroom	2	8	2	12	2.00

Step 2: Making a Professional Development Plan

Step 1: Establish a Timeline
- Determine an accomplishable timeline for projects, trainings, or a schedule for regular professional development

Step 2: Identify Partnerships
- Identify professional development opportunities that may already be happening in your institution or partner libraries that you might be able to take advantage of
- Investigate current strengths and skill sets in your library and how to utilize those individual strengths in a development plan

Step 3: Choose a Medium
- Selecting the most effective way to convey information serves a different purpose than monthly mentoring or casual conversation. Here are some of the mediums you might consider when making a plan:

Formal Training	Informal Formats
Workshops	Mentoring
Tutorials (can be watched on your own time)	Peer-to-Peer
Webinars & seminars	Meet-ups (Brown Bags or Coffee Talks)
Online classes	

Step 4: Develop a Schedule
- Plan out a schedule of professional development opportunities based on the feedback you received from your assessment
- Maintain a level of flexibility within your plan when possible to allow for changes and to take advantage of opportunities as they arise

Step 3: Implementing a Plan, Making it Happen

Often times, making it happen simply comes down to: making time and committing to it.

Step 1: Get Buy-In
- Look to administration to support the plan and assess the feasibility of making it happen
- Check-in with everyone participating to figure out appropriate times and formats (staff meetings, workshops, coffee talks, etc.)

Step 2: Make Time
- Set your professional development schedule and promote it with your staff

Step 3: Commit to Your Schedule
- Things come up that demand time and flexibility in your schedule; try not to let professional development sit untouched for too long

Case Study: Instruction Meet-ups

Goal:
One of the goals for the library instruction program was to pull instruction into the conversation more frequently, and turn it into a topic for collaborative sharing.

Details:
In addition to formal meetings to talk about instruction at the library, we scheduled regular "Coffee Talks" during the school year. Bi-weekly, optional get-togethers were held in various locations throughout the library. Each gathering had a specific, instruction-related topic of discussion, often linked to the venue chosen. For instance, the manager of our Academic & Research Commons demonstrated the use of a presentation room.

Advantages:
- Facilitates productive reflection by providing a time to informally reflect with others
- Conversations can be more organic: the frequent, less formal setting can help make it a more collaborative, spontaneous conversation
- It maintains an informal nature, while simultaneously creating a structured setting, allowing for regular check-ins among staff and collaboration opportunities

Alternatives: Depending on your institutional culture or your department, you might try having this be a lunch talk, walking meeting, etc. for whatever topic or department you want to apply it to.

Case Study: Instruction Schedule

After the survey of library faculty about instruction, the results were collated and high scoring areas of interest were ranked higher on the timeline.

The topics in this schedule took a few different forms:
1. Workshop of combined topics
2. Multiple session workshops
3. 10 minute activities during faculty meetings
4. Demonstrations

The topics marked TBD lower on this chart received very low priority scores and therefore weren't included in the immediate professional development plan and are instead in consideration for future development planning.

Training Topic	Timeline
Lesson planning	March 20
In-class assessment	March 20
Writing Outcomes	March 20
Using libguide software	March 27 & 13
Outreach to departments	March 20
Engaging your audience	January 23
Team Teaching	February 2
Case-based learning	March 20
Using your space	June 15
Classroom games	TBD
Coping with a classroom crisis	TBD
Follow up after a session	TBD
Teaching Library Lesson	TBD
Using humor in the classroom	TBD

Step 4: Evaluating & Reassessing

Various evaluation methods can be used to assess the usefulness of professional development efforts after the fact.

Some modes of evaluation you might consider are:
- Have participants complete a post-activity feedback form or survey to gauge PD effectiveness
- Solicit informal verbal or written testimonials from participants
- Observation: do you notice an overall improvement in the conveyed skills?
- Review survey results retrospectively. Have areas of need been addressed?

Use the results of these formal and informal evaluations to guide modification and improved professional development techniques. Keep an eye out for indicators that a professional development activity wasn't helpful and the possibility that you might need to provide additional training opportunities. Evaluation can also provide you with a better sense of preferred format and what succeeded.

Case Study: Post-Evaluation

At the end of the academic year, we asked participating faculty to please comment on the usefulness of instruction trainings from the past 2014-15 academic year:

"I really appreciate organized opportunities to learn more about instruction technologies and their successful implementation from friendly, approachable experts in each program."

"I like the trainings - it puts us all on the same page and clarifies expectations and instruction standards."

"I found the [presentation on] Libguides helpful as I had never put one together."

"The Instruction Meet-ups are a nice way for me to check in and see if I am on the right track and learn what others are doing in their classes."

"The workshop was nice because it concentrated a full day on one focus."