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Keeping it Current: Avenues for Staff Development

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Introduction

Whether you are providing staff training in preparation for new library initiatives, or just trying to keep up with current programs and technology, staff development is an integral part of maintaining a progressive and prepared library. The multitude of means for delivering staff development have also made it easier to overcome various time, space, or technology restrictions to making it a regular part of library work. However, regardless of how deliverable staff trainings may be, in our busy lives it still takes time to make a plan for staff development. This article outlines a method for making such a plan for your own library and examines case study examples from Central Washington University.

Before creating your master plan for staff development at your own institution, make sure you have the approval of your library administration at an early stage. Getting buy-in from administration is extremely important for supporting staff development and assessing its feasibility. Bringing in an expensive workshop facilitator or sending staff and faculty to conferences can be a serious fiscal undertaking. However, staff development doesn't always need to be a pricey burden and this article will include examples of staff development activities that do not require bringing in experts.

Creating Your Master Game Plan

Assessing Needs, Identifying Strengths

You may have a focus area for staff development that is already determined for your library. However, before you select or implement training or projects, it is helpful to have some gauge of your library personnel strengths, and areas for growth. Identifying staff strengths recognizes and encourages the sharing of personal expertise. Taking time to reflect on current staff strengths can help identify ways of using existing expertise in trainings for the rest of your staff. It can allow you to collaborate within your library to share the abilities, strengths, and skills of employees for the overall benefit of the library.

Assessment comes in a variety of forms and flavors, and it is important to choose something that will work for your institution and work environment. This does not necessarily need to be a drawn out or intense process, just intentionally done. See Table 1 for example approaches to determining strengths and weaknesses at your own institution.

The following three case studies are intended to provide examples of practical applications for these methods and illustrate their use in a context. While they have been applied to the library instruction department in these examples, the methods used could be applicable to a variety of circumstances or departments for professional development. Each case study includes an objective, reviews the method used, and discusses the results.

Approaches for Assessment

Approach	Potential Benefits	Potential Conflicts
Informal Conversation	Can be effective in one-on-one conversations or small groups Doesn't require a lot of pre-planning or prep-work	Can get unwieldy in larger staff meetings where it's harder to get everyone's opinions Can feel confrontational if employee culture doesn't currently project a norm of staff development
Formalized Surveys (Powell, 1997)	Allows for anonymous feedback Allows for generalizations about a group based on standardized response options Can allow for convenience of responder	Often involves a time-delay in order to allow everyone time to respond Response rates can be low
Observation (Powell, 1997)	Can provide an immediate, 2 nd party assessment of knowledge May identify motives or behavior previously not thought of	Can make staff/faculty uncomfortable Can be time consuming depending on staff size
Suggestion Box	Provides consistent collection of suggestions Allows for anonymous feedback	Responders will self-select, may not be representative of a group

Table 1

CASE STUDY 1: Library Instruction Survey

Objective: With the establishment of new instructional initiatives and expectations at Brooks Library of Central Washington University, it was important to assess the comfort level of our teaching librarians with regard to various instruction elements.

Method: We used an online survey method to discover our staff's interests in instruction development topics. The survey asked questions about librarian comfort level with instruction concepts, practices, etc. We conducted the survey using Qualtrics software.

Results: These responses were used to compile a plan of action on what areas of library instruction would be a focus for faculty development that year. Table 2 shows an example of the types of questions asked. The mean scores were later used to make generalizations about the faculty interests and determine a schedule of trainings throughout the year.

Table 2

Questions used on Survey

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

Creating a Schedule

When starting any kind of library training project keep in mind you don't have to do everything at once! Once you have conducted a needs assessment, you can start determining where to focus your attention. This will ultimately inform your long-term plan. The following steps are intended to provide you with a starting place and subsequent actions.

Step 1. Establish a Timeline:

Determine an accomplishable timeline for projects, trainings, or a schedule for regular professional development. Making time for professional development can be a challenge. However, making a schedule and setting aside time can help you stick to it. Things come up that demand time and flexibility in your schedule; be realistic about your institutional needs to be flexible, but try not to let professional development sit untouched for too long. Don't forget to promote events or training with your staff.

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. If you've investigated current strengths and skill sets in your library, you can start thinking about ways to utilize them.

Step 3. Choose a Medium:

Selecting the most effective way to convey information serves a different purpose than monthly mentoring or casual conversation. Once you've decided what content to focus on, you'll need to make a plan of how to deliver it. Table 3 provides a few mediums you might consider when making a plan.

Table 3 *Mediums for Delivery*

Formalized Formats:	Informal Formats:
Workshops	Mentoring
Tutorials	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. Depending on your institutional culture, you may need to maintain a level of flexibility within your plan, when possible, to allow for changes and to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

CASE STUDY 2: Instruction Meetups

Objective: 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.

Method: 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.

Results: These informal meet-ups facilitated reflection by providing a time to informally reflect and share with others. The informal nature of the conversations within a structured setting allowed for regular check-ins among staff and exposed collaborative opportunities.

Alternatives: Depending on your institutional culture or your department, you might try running

this as a lunch talk, walking meeting, or similar informal exchange for your chosen topic or department.

Evaluating and Reassessing

It still holds that evaluation is key to future performance so plan it, do it, evaluate it. When it comes to professional development, various evaluation methods can be used to assess its usefulness after the fact. Here are some modes of evaluation you might consider:

- **Feedback Forms:** Have participants complete a post-activity feedback form or survey to gauge professional development effectiveness
- **Testimonials:** Solicit informal verbal or written testimonials from participants
- **Observations:** do you notice an overall improvement in the conveyed skills?

Review your results retrospectively. Have areas of need been addressed? Use the results of these formal and informal evaluations to guide modification and improve 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 3: Post-evaluation of Instruction Professional Development

Objective: After a full academic year and multiple instruction-based professional development activities, the Instruction Coordinator wanted to gauge what library faculty gained from the activities and identify which activities were useful.

Method: At the end of the academic year, participating faculty were asked to complete a short, 3-question survey about the usefulness of instruction trainings from the past academic year via a Qualtrics survey (online). *Note:* informal feedback on instruction related professional development had been received throughout the year. However, this survey attempted to formalize those responses and prompt individual reflection. The survey included the following three questions:

1. Please comment on the usefulness of instruction trainings from the past 2014-15 academic year:
2. Were there any specific trainings that you found particularly helpful? What were they or what about them was helpful?
3. Were there any specific trainings that you found particularly unhelpful? What were they or what about them was unhelpful?

Results: Faculty who participated in the survey provided useful feedback regarding the development activities. Some commented on specific workshops that were helpful or activities they would like to be continued. Participants also provided constructive critique on which activities were less helpful or how they could be altered.

Concluding Thoughts

Staff development does not need to be a grand, expensive endeavor. Most professional development projects that came out of the presented case studies were not costly. Many of the trainings were able to utilize existing faculty strengths in the library or the expertise of someone else at the institution. In moving forward for our institution, these evaluations can be used to inform future professional development initiatives at our library in their focus, format, and regularity. Professional development can be a variety of things ranging from a formal presentation to a casual conversation. The important thing is to make it continual.

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