Professional Development Focus Groups-
Summer 2017
Summary & Recommendations

Background

The Professional Development Steering committee has been charged with developing a set of recommendations with priorities and pathways that lead to a comprehensive program for professional development at Michigan Tech.

The steering committee convened a working group with the charge to support the developing and ongoing work of the Professional Development Steering Committee with the tasks of data collection and analysis and program development, implementation, assessment and other support as requested.

The initial group tasks were as follows:

1. Develop survey questions to be asked of both individual employees and supervisors that will help identify professional development needs and areas where there are gaps at Michigan Tech.
2. Develop a recommended format for the survey(s), timeline for deployment, communications plan, and plan for analysis of results.
3. Provide thoroughly researched and considered recommendations for review to the Steering Committee.

The working group was made up of Heidi Reid, Gail Sweeting, Pete Baril, Karen Maki and Bob Hiltunen.

Methodology

A survey was constructed, vetted with the steering committee and University survey experts and then executed in the spring of 2017. The results were analyzed and in an effort to add further meaning to the answers, gain detailed information to help understand the true state of non-union staff thoughts on professional development, focus groups were formed. Heidi Reid and Bob Hiltunen facilitated four cohorts of non-union staff of approximately 10 members each from across the University. Each group was asked a standard series of questions regarding their own opinions and philosophy of professional development at Michigan Tech. The responses were broken down into responses by each cohort and returned to the working group for
analysis and discussion. The working group them condensed each question to seek out commonalities and differences among cohorts. (Appendix A).

Results

The recorded responses clearly indicate that professional development is an important need at Michigan Tech. A wide variety of professional development topics were mentioned in both the survey and focus groups.

In general the focus group participants agreed with the survey results as far as the definition of professional development. The consensus is that there is a need for a clearinghouse where people can learn about the professional development opportunities on campus. Participants were of the opinion that there should be centralized funding for professional development. Most members of the focus groups believe that there is a need for defined career paths at the University.

Participants agreed that there are some very good professional development opportunities on campus but are either not open to everyone or not known about. There are many formats that professional development can be offered in. There is a desire to have interdepartmental professional development opportunities. There is a desire to have communication and education concerning professional development housed in one department.

Communication is a key training category, whether presenting information to groups or learning to say the right things to difficult individuals. The Interpersonal skills and understanding people from other cultures or underrepresented communities also fall into this category. Participants felt that topics are advertised but people are not seeing them, ignoring them, or placing them at a lower priority (to maintain worklife balance).

Off-campus training is favored over on-campus training; however, funding is an obstacle. Relevancy is a key concern. People don’t want to waste time, spend money unwisely, or go to a training that doesn’t matter. The participants felt that knowledge isn’t built upon because of siloed work or no place for sharing the experience. There is no path the for the career advancement value of the training.

Participants saw time and money as the biggest obstacles to professional development. They felt that if the topic has value it is worth committing to attend. They felt that the same core topics should be offered at various times.

Supervisors have a wide range of topics they feel employees could use training in. Staff feel that supervisors do not always relay training opportunities to the staff.
Recommendations

1. Establish a centralized repository of information concerning professional development opportunities and market it to the campus community.
2. Provide centralized funding for professional development opportunities open to the entire campus.
3. Establish an organizational structure that defines position levels and makes career paths as evident as possible.
4. Make professional development a cultural imperative at the University.
5. Create a professional development program series with leadership, conflict management, project management, and communication as its core topics and offer the training at various times.
Question 1
We’ve defined Professional Development as “facilitated learning such as workshops, academic courses, face-to-face seminars, webinars, e-learning, on-demand courses, video and quiz-based topics, coaching, mentoring, reflective supervision, communities of practice, apprenticeships, professional meetings and conference.” Does professional development mean something different to you?

Alternate Professional Development definitions
- Probationary meetings can be professional development
- Speakers who are experts in their fields
- Online training could be valuable if there was a 10 minute module participants could view as pre-work prior to training.
- Professional opportunities such as sitting on a committee can be a form of PD.
- Does not agree with the definition this person learns from the people around him/her. Gets a high out of conference educational sessions but then has nowhere to practice the skills learned. Using skills learned or having opportunities to use skills learned in PD activities.
- Networking with other professionals in your field at conferences is a form of PD

Counter-measures
- Have an advancement ladder or career ladder could be defined. Advancement path is sometimes more defined for certain departments than others. Need preset goals, milestones and an achievable avenue to get there.
- Have a university professional development calendar where staff can learn about PD opportunities.
- Different departments have different types of PD needs. Department structure is important for engagement. PD needs to be flexible and have guidelines for what needs to be learned to improve your skills
• Departments should collaborate to bring speakers to campus.
• Get together with department coordinators to find out best practices and brainstorm.
• It’s hard to reach a consensus on what is needed from different researchers.
• Should have focus groups for specific groups, such as administrative staff, researchers.

• Education benefits for courses other than Michigan Tech courses.

Miscellaneous answers

• Communication training (listening skills) weekly.
• This persons department holds a retreat at the same time as Student Affairs holds their professional development day.

Takeaways

1. In general the focus group participants agreed with the survey results as far as the definition of professional development.
2. There is a need for a clearinghouse where people can learn about professional development being offered on campus.
3. There should be central funding for professional development.
4. There is a need for defined career paths.

**Question 2**

Our survey indicated that training on Leadership, Conflict Management, Project Management, and Communication would enhance employees’ ability to do their job. How would you see this training being delivered?

**How Professional Development should be delivered**
Project management could be delivered by grad level courses. This training is applicable to all areas on campus. The Library had a project management module now they use Lynda.com. Project management training is dependent on which department you are in.

It should be delivered by collaboration between departments. Through hands on workshops that you can share knowledge and best practices. Through book clubs shared and recorded. Could be delivered by case studies. One person selects the case everyone studies it prior to the PD and then team comes together to review. Sharing how what we do affects others. Could be delivered by a professional society training. Provided by an impartial party, not someone from your department or area. It gets better buy in. Not modules watched at your desk. Similar positions from different departments should get together for training. Delivered by motivational speakers.

Alternative topics that would enhance employees ability to do their jobs

Some other training topics that enhance employees ability to do their jobs would be, Knowing how to lead a team, presenting and marketing, how to run a committee, How to deal with difficult people, finding the right people for a team, Communications with other cultures, leadership development program (All aspects) listening, communications, leading without authority, Scenarios role played first with minimal info provided and then with all the info to see the difference. Training like the UAW certification program for campus non-union staff.

How Professional Development is currently delivered

All directors in student affairs pair up to present on a topic to the student affairs leadership team. The session is recorded so that anyone who missed it can view it. Student affairs does a 6 part series on conflict management and open dialog, The Lean office provides training and goal setting workshops.

Other thoughts on the process of professional development at Michigan Tech
Training should come from the top down. There should be a training department. Supervisor needs to encourage the staff to help provide feedback on what is needed. Need to spell out the basic skills expectations.

From a cost perspective some of the mentioned classes could be provided on campus.

HR or other department should have a way to coordinate all training available and get it out to campus. HR should understand the different areas inside and outside the university and the opportunities that exist. Opportunities on campus are not communicated so people do not know what is available.

There are individual limitations with competency of computer skills.

Takeaways

1. There are currently some very good professional development offerings on campus but are not open to everyone or not know about.
2. There are many forms that Professional Development could be delivered in.
3. There is a desire to have interdepartmental professional development opportunities.
4. There is a desire to have professional development communication housed in one department.
Question 3

Our survey indicated a need for training on topics such as Presenting, Marketing, Strategic Planning, Team Building, Female leadership, and Dealing with Difficult Employees. How do these topics relate to your needs?

Responses related to Q3

Presenting
- Communication—more training on how to communicate.
- Presentations and marketing—what classes fit with our needs
- How to run effective committees and how to be an effective leader on committees
- Communication with other areas and types of employees and getting things from others.

Marketing
- Understanding other cultures from a staff perspective. Provide training on different cultures, languages, etc.
- Presentations and marketing—what classes fit with our needs

Strategic Planning
- How all areas/departments fit into the strategic plan? How your job fits into your division and to the university?
- Strategic plan—where we are and what we need to do based on the “why”.

Team Building
- Finding the right people to be on the team. How do you get enthusiasm?

Female Leadership
- Why is female leadership in the question?
- Researcher commented that out of his 9 bosses, 4 were female and they were the best bosses.

Difficult Employees
- Conflict management—customers, office staff, etc.
- Difficult co-workers
  - Being able to work with and for difficult people
- Conflict management resolution
- Dealing with difficult employees
- Communicating with difficult customers

Other areas that are important
- Worklife balance is very important
● School, family, homework
  ● Flexibility
● All topics are important
● Under represented communities
● Selection of foreign language class available to staff
● Culture training
● Interpersonal skills

Concerns
● If each topic was advertised, they might go
● On campus trainer is less appealing than off campus trainer

Helpful Tips
● Lean facilitator training has helped with all these topics.
● Resources available
● Jill Hodges has training available for dealing with difficult people.
● “Strengths” coaching is available on campus at Student Activities
● Kolbe personality tests—Ian Repp facilitates

Takeaways
1. Communication is a key training category, whether presenting information to groups or learning to say the right things to difficult individuals. Interpersonal skills and understanding people from other cultures or underrepresented communities also fall into this category. These communication topics garnered a lot of discussion.
2. People are aware of training, resources, and coaching.
3. Topics are advertised but people are not seeing them, ignoring them, or placing them at a lower priority (to maintain work/life balance). Saying you “might go” doesn’t merit strong commitment.
Question 4

We found that on-campus workshops or off campus conferences were the best formats for offering professional development. Would you agree? Why or why not?

On-Campus Workshops

Agree
- On campus and off campus trainings are good.
- Yes, in person
- On-campus workshops, planning, framework, and the blueprint for what it takes to be successful in our jobs.
- Depends on what it is (mentoring programs are an example)
- Well-designed, on campus training using multiple campus employees to provide the training. Must be communicated well in advance (one month).
- Better to have live training sessions verses remotely . . . example the university safety training—very burdensome.

Obstacles
- Release time to attend trainings and professional development
- Presentation must be knowledgeable and presented by subject matter experts.
- Being strategic about what you go to.
- Coming back and trying to provide the training to the group is challenging.
- After training, there is no outlet to bring up ideas learned.
- People are too siloed.

Off Campus Conferences

Agree
- Dedicated away time that helps rejuvenate the mind.
- Yes, in person
- Off campus that focuses on our job duties with lots of new ideas
- Away from desk training is best so that you are not interrupted.
- Agree, in office trainings are not effective as you are interrupted or distracted.
- Regional or local conferences and make them mandatory.
Office of Administration

- Off campus—focuses on your area of expertise and you are with people that are like you and do the same work as you. You feel that you are part of a community.
- Off campus as a team training. It helps the team get a new perspective.

Obstacles
- Central funds for conferences (soft funded departments and others don’t have money for staff to attend trainings)
- Academic departments concentrate mostly on academic staff for development. They don’t have the funds or the size to provide professional development to staff.
- Cost associated with off campus is a hindrance.
- Diversity of constituents—soft funded departments don’t have money or time available.
- Cost associated with off campus conference when you get the little nugget of info you needed versus taking a campus course.
- Tying goals or paths to certification to training.
- Presentation must be knowledgeable and presented by subject matter experts.
- Being strategic about what you go to.
- Coming back and trying to provide the training to the group is challenging.
- After training, there is no outlet to bring up ideas learned.
- People are too siloed.

Other Formats for Offering Professional Development
- Networking
- Types of business seen from a different point of view (staff going to other departments to see how things work)
- Networking on campus—similar positions have monthly meetings and find out best practices.
- In some cases, webinars and E-learning are more convenient.
- Being able to apply the workshop or training to your daily work life is more beneficial.
- Interested in taking courses that are shorter and not a semester long. You can do a lot in 4 weeks.

Takeaways
1. Off-campus training is favored over on-campus training; however, funding is a big obstacle.
2. Relevancy is a key concern. People don’t want to waste time, spend money unwisely, or go to training that doesn’t matter.
3. There’s a black hole in the follow-through of training. The knowledge isn’t built upon because of siloed work or no process in place for sharing the experience. Plus, there’s no blueprint for the career advancement value of the training.
Question 5
We found that timing and scheduling of professional development was an obstacle to participating. Would you agree? Why or why not?

Agree: Why:

- TIMING and MONEY are big obstacles in most areas.
- People would to sign up for training but don’t get approval from supervisor.
- Scheduling conflicts cause issues.
- Academic departments have issues around academic calendar. There is always something going on that is more important.
- Time really is the #1.
- People who do the training are making it available during their most convenient time, not the customer's time.
- This is driven by the academic calendar.
- Hard to go anywhere in the winter time in this area.
- Hard to go anywhere in the summer time.
- Timing is always a barrier.
- Depends on our individual job.
- Funding is an issue.
- Doing things outside your workday.
- Work life balance.
Big blocks of time away from office cause issues with work not getting done at your desk.
Never know what is going on day to day. There is time to commit.

Do Not Agree: Why not?

- If training is scheduled well in advance.
- Any excuse to not be at my desk.
- If it matters, I will try to make it work.
- Only time is Christmas and New Years.
- May is quiet
- Provide training that is given more than once. This depends on:
  - What is going on in the department
  - Who we think should attend
  - Providing the training more than once
- Have pool available for PD that employees apply too, must participate in, and come back and teach back to others
- Scheduling varies across campus, they should be scheduled a month in advance.
- No training at the start and end of the semester.
- Offer multiple opportunities for the same topics.

Takeaways:

- Time and money is a big concern
- If the topic has value it is worth committing to attend and having the same topics offered various times

**Question 6**

Are there skills that you would like to learn that could help you do better in your job that are not addressed through professional development? If you are a supervisor, would you also answer this from your leadership position to help us identify what skills gaps exist?
Desired skills to Learn: Staff Response:

- Bridging the gap between faculty and staff collaboration.
- Processes change without being told or it being communicated.
- Difficult conversations.
- Being familiar with computer programs.
- Trying to standardize communication. Need clearinghouse for professional development opportunities.
- Not aware of opportunities.
- Skills in all areas, not just communication.
- Break to educate.
- Strategic planning and how do you facilitate that with your team?
- What is defined as professional development?
- Educate supervisors on passing on opportunities available.
- Free professional development on Michigan Works website.
- Taking classes at other institutions that would be covered by our employee benefit.
- Managing personal growth. Everyone has their own job and must determine their own individual growth potential.
- List of professional development in a central location on campus.
- Fund raising and working with alumni and donors.
- Communication across the same department.
- Business plans and proposal writing, educational plans.
- How individual mechanisms works, having training on webFOCUS, Banner.
- Working with committees.
- Leadership without authority topic. Earning respect from others.

Supervisor Response:

- Supervisor- Lack skill of seeing the big picture or how they fit into the whole organization.
- Supervisor- workshop grant writing.
- Supervisor- Understanding the tasks specific or what can a supervisor delegate to staff.
Supervisor- Conflict management is needed for office staff.
Supervisor- Sales and negotiations skills
Supervisor - Customer service training and understanding where the customer is coming from.
Supervisor - Time management needs & priorities.
Young professional need more training to learn to work with people their own age.
Supervisor- Understanding the tasks specific or what can a supervisor delegate to staff.
Supervisor - don’t know what training works best for each staff.
Supervisor - Knowing the strengths of others and how to use those strengths effectively.

Takeaways:

- Supervisors have a wide range of topics they feel employees could use training in
- Staff feel that supervisors do not always relay training opportunities to the staff
- Not aware of opportunities – lack of communication
- Outdated training – would like to see updated topics.
Question 7
What are the barriers to your professional development opportunities? If you are a supervisor what are the barriers to providing your staff with more opportunities?

BARRIERS:
- **Money**
- **Time**
  - Communication - knowledge of opportunities, includes issues with both on and off campus opportunities.
  - General fund vs non general fund - differing opportunities.
  - Issues with vision and planning for development of employees
  - No one to cover your work while you are gone.
  - Fear of development bringing on more work and responsibility without additional compensation.
  - Apathy - what will this do for me
  - Research staff, issues with culture between researchers and faculty, not treated equally.
  - Development not prioritized - staff not sure of what they should be pursuing.
  - Information not tracked.
  - Supervisor won't allow development
  - Leadership is a barrier, department culture is a barrier
  - Travel challenges

OPPORTUNITIES:
- Centralize professional development, allow sharing of information and cost.
Focus on shorter training opportunities locally vs leaving town for a one day training.
- Fellowship opportunities
- Focus groups that come together for extended periods to work on problem solving.
- University cohorts, ½ day increments, learn specific aspects of working at MTU.
- Partner with other colleges or universities to job swap.
- Mentoring

Question 8

Is there anything else you would like to say about professional development at Michigan Tech?
- UAW course skills set varies per attendees in the course. One person will be completely knowledgeable and the next will need most of the trainer's attention.
- There are no deliverables from the UAW courses.
- Focus groups -
  - International hiring, Housing and hiring (grad), Access to MTU systems
- Working to break down Silos
- Centralized budget for staff to take sabbatical for development and to learn more skills.
- Staff employment exchange opportunities to visit other universities or businesses.
- Defined career path and what are the options.
- The opportunities are a lot more robust than at other universities which is good.
- The opportunities to take classes is nice.
- Raises are not directly correlated to the professional development value to the university.
- Accessible technology group.
- ADA regulations that will be applying to all trainings on campus have to be created to accommodate disabilities such as vision, hearing, etc.
- Faculty fellowship program.
- The opportunity to have staff switch departments as a development tool.
- There is a divide between faculty and staff.
- Needs a better compensation, classification and title system.
- It's good that conversations are happening and sometimes you don’t know that you have the support.
- Cultural change depends on where you work.
- The microcosm will expand from the department to the university to the community.
• Managing personal growth with an incentive
• Apply for professional development money and complete a form explaining why it would benefit your job.
• Networking after conferences
• Book clubs across campus