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Zoom in:

Non-traditional Models of Staff Enrichment

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Abstract from Conference Program:

Discuss innovative staff enrichment programs that work in all library settings. As we zoom in, we will focus on four successful areas for building staff, campus and community cohesiveness, and for providing an atmosphere of professional growth and life-long learning. These four areas include Social, Skill Building, Awareness and Networking.

[Power Point Presentation](#) (PowerPoint format only)

Training in academic libraries requires much more than the acquisition of traditional library skills. Today, to work in a research/academic library, skill sets must be constantly renewed to match the speed of technological innovation. Whether a librarian or a paraprofessional, up-to-date computer skills are at the top of the hiring qualifications list. Academic libraries have completed a 180-degree turn; positions in areas such as reference, cataloging, instructional services and circulation have been radically impacted by technology. Currently, digitization is the leading trend that influences the information we provide in libraries and redefines our job descriptions.

Responding to new user needs and expectations, training of employees has emerged as the key to addressing the more technical role that we as information providers must fulfill. For example, the concept of the Information Commons has become a catalyst for libraries to rethink and reposition skill sets of employees and departments; it has provided libraries with an opportunity to revitalize traditional positions. In this new era, a shift to the transformation and creation of knowledge *by students* has found its place in academic libraries.

In this article, the authors will address four areas for building staff and campus cohesiveness and for providing an atmosphere conducive to professional growth and life-long learning. The literature uses the concept “hybrid libraries” to describe the work-style that is now evolving in

response to the paradigm shift in students' learning models. According to James W. Marcum of Fairleigh Dickinson University, the libraries of the future will demand increased informational literacy and appliance use¹. Training today should address these issues to operate in the vision of the library of tomorrow. As technology develops, in both a technical and intellectual level, new skill sets are required. Communications styles are changing dramatically. Libraries are now more holistically involved in providing an effective learning center.

Lisa Allen from Kutztown University reports, "Two elements of a hybrid service model in the academic library are flexible organizational structures and staff possessing hybrid skills, facilitated by a shared culture."² This model offers a winning approach by bringing together constituencies with shared values and commitments.

Creating strategic partnerships also supports an ongoing trend in higher education. An article by Jean Donham and Corey Green that includes a noteworthy model is "Developing a Culture of Collaboration: Librarian as Consultant,"³ which describes the Cornell College Library reinvention of the library's role as a teaching and learning center; but the process discussed can fit into any library setting. All three articles stress training and skills as key to success with the transformation.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Libraries continues to excel at providing services to meet expanding responsibilities to the research community. We are moving full-speed ahead with creating a more productive learning environment, which will address information needs with digital age technology .

The UTK Libraries' Staff Development Advisory Committee (SDAC) —a standing committee with broad staff and faculty representation that suggests and organizes programs of interest to staff—zoomed in on programs in the areas of *Skill Building*, reaching the platform of expertise needed for productive job performance; *Awareness* and *Networking*, gaining knowledge and having excellent communication resources in place; and having a *mechanism for welcoming and introducing new employees* to library organizations. This paper, and its accompanying [PowerPoint presentation](#), will explain how these programs can be applied in different library settings.

To determine how to prioritize skill and training issues, the Libraries' Training unit and SDAC looked carefully at the information needs of library employees. Other factors in program selection include input from library employees, the state of technology (locally and profession-wide), and library mission and goals. Library training classes are open to all library employees and utilize both in-house expertise and outside experts.

Skill Building

Best practices for these programs involve flexible methods – a balance of hands-on, informational and demonstrations – integrated to meet various learning styles. Introduction of technological information such as copyright, digital images and data, and media storage are good choices for demonstration classes; however, many Microsoft Office, HTML, full-text database and desktop publishing topics have worked well as hands-on classes. To reach desired results these classes are flavored with participation incentives – campus bookstore certificates, subscriptions to magazines, Godiva® chocolates and gift certificates to popular area restaurants.

Networking

However, skill building is only the first step to life-long learning. One of the most accessible methods for sharpening job performance is networking. Networking, a means for people to connect and exchange information, can occur anywhere, from airports to restaurants, but can also happen in a controlled environment. The UTK Libraries offers many occasions at which staff and faculty can meet and mingle, and share knowledge and experiences—providing formal support for an informal route to new career, educational, and training opportunities.

SDAC also sponsors tours to other University of Tennessee departments each year. This program is driven primarily by new services and resources on campus. However, tours to established departments are also provided in order to allow library employees the opportunity to learn about services that are available to students, faculty and staff. The library serves as a central hub for students who are seeking specific information not only for academic reference resources but also for campus resources. This networking between the library and other campus units provides library staff with up-to-date information and results in, better service to the university's students.

Another form of networking among the library's staff is an internal online bulletin board, called SharePage. SDAC is one of several library committees that frequently post upcoming events such as trips, receptions, and training classes on this news page. All library employees have access to the news page and are encouraged to consult it often to stay informed about events that may enhance their learning opportunities.

The Career Employee Program (CEP) is a competitive program offered within the library to staff who are interested in developing a para-professional career in the library field. This program provides continuing educational and career building opportunities for these participants. In order to be eligible for this program each individual must be a permanent, full-time, non-exempt staff member with a minimum of three years of library experience. Applicants submit an essay outlining an individualized program of staff development to be completed outside of normal work hours. A CEP review board selects the winning participants. Participants are given two years to fulfill all program requirements. Successful completion of the program entails a salary increase.

Each staff member chosen to participate in the program must complete five steps within the two-year deadline:

- Successfully complete two School of Information Sciences courses
- Attend two hands-on training workshops and submit a written report on each
- Participate in two library conferences
- Serve on two library committees
- Complete two significant library-related projects such as preparing papers, articles, publishing book reviews, or making presentations

SDAC works with Career Employee Program participants to assist them in fulfilling CEP program requirements by identifying workshop and conference opportunities, by advertising brown bag presentations, by refining and enhancing proposed projects, etc. This help provides the CEP participants with opportunities to apply their new knowledge and to gain valuable experience.

Networking is a valuable tool and will work in almost any size academic library. Information that is learned and shared among library staff (such as from training classes) will enhance employee confidence, self-esteem and creativity. This will lead to both higher productivity and better service to the university's students and faculty.

Awareness Programs

In addition to traditional networking opportunities, the UTK Libraries has developed activities aimed at overcoming walls between different units and creating a more congenial work environment. These activities, called Awareness Programs, exist in many forms, from day trips to newsletters to health corners. SDAC created the Awareness Programs to inform, educate and promote the committee's activities throughout the libraries. SDAC's goal is to build a welcoming and productive working environment for all – regardless of title or position within the library.

Annual day trips are organized to enable UTK Libraries employees to connect and network with other information professionals from other types of libraries, fostering a forum for communicating, collaborating, and sharing ideas. In addition, day trips cultivate togetherness and improved working relationships among employees.

Because the library sets aside annual funds to support SDAC activities, the group strives to link employee interests to organizational mission and goals. Surveys and word-of-mouth help the group identify trips that will interest employees as well as benefit the organization. Following approval by the library administration, a trip itinerary is presented to library employees. Trips are open to all full-time employees, but participation is limited by budget and scheduling concerns. Trip participation is on a first-come, first-served basis, allowing

approximately 20 to 30 participants per day trip. To view pictures of previous years' trips, please visit the SDAC Web site at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/LibraryTraining/sdac/trips.html>.

Producing newsletters is another way SDAC informs and educates—and promotes its own activities. The newsletters are published bimonthly and distributed to all employees of the UTK Libraries. Several newsletters can be viewed on SDAC's Web page for library staff, at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/LibraryTraining/sdac/news.html>.

A new feature on SDAC's Web page is the Health Corner, aimed at providing employees with insight on issues related to balancing life and work. By providing such information, the committee hopes to create a healthy working environment that will enable employees to be more effective and productive at their day-to-day tasks. The Health Corner can be viewed at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/LibraryTraining/sdac/healthcorner.html>.

Awareness programs have successfully supported the goals of the committee and the organization by fostering better networking relationships and offering project/research collaboration opportunities to junior and new faculty.

Welcoming New Employees

As our organization grows, many physical and departmental barriers prohibit broad-based interaction, a concern stressed on an SDAC employee survey. The yearly New Employee Tea addresses those concerns. The Tea brings together most of the concepts previously mentioned – from networking to awareness – creating an environment that fosters learning in a social arena. In its third year, the New Employee Tea allows for creativity and fun, while making new employees feel comfortable in their new work setting. Everyone is involved, from the dean of libraries to library donors.

SDAC starts planning for the reception several months in advance. Every task, from table decorations to marketing, is considered, and different members of SDAC take charge of completing different tasks. The event is advertised via flyers, formal printed invitations, and one-on-one invitations from SDAC members.



The most recent New Employee Tea reception was held on August 3, 2004. Photos and brief profiles of new employees were featured on a poster board. Everyone enjoyed consulting the board to discover more about their new colleagues and friends.

SDAC also hosted a cooking contest at the Tea, called "Sweets and Finger Treats." Everyone enjoyed several varieties of hot and cold tea along with the desserts and appetizers provided by entrants to the cooking contest.

Employees who did not wish to participate in the contest but wanted to contribute to the reception also provided snacks for their co-workers. The reception attendees acted as judges by tasting the goodies and voting for their favorite from each category. Attendees placed blue and green dot stickers onto the card placed next to each dish to vote for their favorite sweet treats and appetizers.



Near the end of the reception, an SDAC member counted the dots and the two dishes that received the most dots were declared the winners. The Libraries' Dean, Barbara Dewey, announced the names of the winners and presented prizes (gift certificates to local eateries).



SDAC did not forget to thank everyone for their contribution in to the Tea. Thank you cards were sent to every participant.



The UTK Libraries is a large system with five branch libraries and more than 175 full-time employees. Previously, there was no established means of introducing our new employees to different departments. The New Employee Tea is SDAC's friendly way to introduce new

employees to the rest of the staff. This reception also creates a friendly environment inside the libraries and makes our workplace a better environment for all employees in the library.

This large-scale event can be adapted to better introduce employees within smaller library organizations. Smaller libraries could create a poster board with new employees' pictures and short bios—also a gracious way to introduce new employees to patrons. There will always be a need for introducing new employees. The success of the first reception encourages us to continue the tradition.

In Conclusion

The speed of technological innovation and the changing learning styles of today's students have highlighted the importance of effective training in academic libraries. Libraries must provide their staff with every available tool for professional growth and life-long learning. The training methods mentioned in this article comprise only one model of staff enrichment. However, skill building, awareness and networking are integral to establishing a steady foundation for the learning paradigm transformation. Each of these areas holistically improves both an individual's skill sets and personal development. As we are training ourselves to provide good leadership in our communities, we should always invite the community to provide feedback to create a vision that encompasses all shareholders. True, successful visions should include many opportunities to "zoom-in," seeking the pulse of patron needs. Once this pulse is found, a concerted effort should be made to equip employees to adequately address patron needs. Assessment methods should also be in place to evaluate the effects of the changes made. Libraries must be both a learning organization as well as an organization that learns.

[1](#) James W. Marcum, "Visions: The Academic Library in 2012," D-Lib Magazine (May 2003). Available: <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/may03/marcum/05marcum.html>.

[2](#) Lisa Allen, "Hybrid Librarians in the 21st Century Library: A Collaborative Service-Staffing Model," in Lisa Allen's possession. [unpublished]

[3](#) Jean Donham and Corey Williams Green, "Developing a Culture of Collaboration: Librarian as Consultant," The Journal of Academic Librarianship (July 2004): 316.

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