

# Professional Development Task Force Report

**Task Force Charge:** With the UO's IT staff numbering well over 200, improved coordination of the various training and professional development opportunities for IT employees is needed. The Professional Development Task Force was formed to help survey the IT community and recommend ways in which the committee can meet the training and professional development needs of the UO's IT staff. The task force is charged with:

- Reviewing training and professional development offerings provided by HR, the Library and IS.
- Surveying DeptComp to determine training and professional development needs for UO IT personnel.
- Recommending a way to best address these training and professional development needs.
- Exploring and recommending other ways to strengthen the IT community through training and professional development.

## **Review of Current Professional Development Opportunities**

**Human Resource Programs:** Human Resources offers two training programs. RAA Library Courses are available as a choice of three on-line libraries. Employees may complete the courses at their leisure.

*RAA PC & Business Skills:* This library includes all versions of MS Office, i.e., Word Excel, Access, PowerPoint and Outlook and are approved prepared for the MS Office Specialist Certification.

*RAA IC3:* This library includes classes to prepare for the three exams which must be taken to complete the Internet and Computing Core Certification. This is a fundamental computer concepts course with classes such as Managing Files and Folders; Exploring Email Options and Netiquette; and Finalizing and Printing Worksheets.

*RAA A+ Certification:* This library is available to those who wish to earn their A+ certified Computer Technician Certification.

New Horizons offers face-to-face classes on a variety of subjects including Microsoft Programs, Dreamweaver and Crystal Reports. They require employee to be out of the office extended time periods (i.e., one or two days). Both the RAA and New Horizons programs require departments to pay a portion of this training with the Employee Benefit fund picking up the remainder.

In addition to these programs, the Professional Partners Mentoring Program offers groups of staff members with common needs the opportunity to meet on a consistent basis and share information. Current offerings include Excel, FileMaker Pro and Web Mechanics.

## **Knight Library Programs**

The Knight Library offers "workshops on demand," customized training on lists of subjects compiled from user requests with a focus on academic and curricular topics. Topics range from Streaming Media and GIS products to Excel and Web searching.

## **Center for Educational Technologies (CET)**

The Center for Educational Technologies is available for UO instructors who want make more effective use of technology in their teaching. Geared for instructional needs, CET provides assistance and referrals for educational technology training, support and production. It is also the primary source of support for Blackboard technology.

## **Teacher Effectiveness Program (TEP)**

The TEP program offers resources for teachers who want to integrate technology into their teaching. They consult with departments and individual faculty on topics such as grading with Excel, creating web-pages and scanning images.

## **Documents Room**

The Documents Room stocks training tools and reference books on a wide variety of computer-related topics. This resource is open to students, faculty and staff.

## **College Courses**

The University of Oregon and Lane Community College both offer courses in computer science and educational technology that are available to staff members who are able to commit to the time required to complete a traditional course.

## **Professional Tools for Digital Media**

The UO Art Department and Continuing Education offer training in graphics and multimedia design. These are traditional credit courses, open to faculty, staff and students.

## **Ad Hoc Groups**

There are often ad-hoc groups that meet regarding a specific item of interest to IT professionals. For example, a podcasting interest group was recently set up by the staff in the Knight Library and initiated by a conversation on the DeptComp list serve.

Through review of these offerings, it is apparent that professional development opportunities do exist for specific software and are available for faculty to encourage use of technology in the classroom. In addition, there are several offerings to train staff in the software they use in their positions. However, professional development opportunities for IT professionals to learn to support the technology taught to faculty and staff and to improve and develop their careers appears to be lacking.

## **Challenges to Obtaining Training**

In order to become fully informed on the challenges facing UO Information Technology support staff, the task force conducted discussions and surveyed IT staff to identify obstacles to training. These include:

- Difficulty in obtaining leave time (due to the fact that a department often employs only one IT professional);
- Logistical difficulties in taking certification tests that are offered in Portland, rather than Eugene;
- Difficulty in securing fiscal support from departments;
- Lack of encouragement for training opportunities from management;
- Failure of management to articulate clear incentives for and benefits from developmental opportunities;
- Lack of university-sponsored IT professional development opportunities;
- Dissemination of training information in a decentralized system;
- Administrative support needs when a department wants to hold a training;
- Difficulty in tailoring trainings for varying levels of IT professionals who attend;
- Challenges with compiling and maintaining a current list of training topics of interest over time;

The task force was also concerned that, due to the decentralized nature of the UO IT environment, new IT employees are somewhat isolated and may not become acquainted with personnel and resources that they would find useful.

## **Observations**

The task force noted that while there are multiple venues for *faculty* in need of technology training, training for *support staff in information technology related positions* on technology development, technology institution, support and use is minimal or non-existent. Anecdotal evidence points to many attempts to develop opportunities, such as lunch discussions, on-campus conferences and interest groups; however, without a responsible point person (or department), these opportunities are infrequent.

IT staff show a strong interest in training and professional development events that are currently offered as evidenced by the wide range of responses and suggestions received to the Professional Development Opportunity Survey. The large attendance at DeptComp meetings -- averaging 80 members per meeting -- also shows a keen interest in increased communication among information technology support staff. In addition, establishment of a separate venue to expand the boundaries within IT support on campus was well received.

The survey results showed the top obstacles for training from those listed are:

1/ Finding applicable opportunities	56%
2/ Lack of nearby training opportunities	46%
3/ Finding money to pay for training	43%

Responses to queries about the professional development content resulted in a wide range of responses (only top 5 included):

1/ Security	-	75%
2/ Databases	-	68%
3/ Records Retention	-	60%
4/ Project Management	-	58%
5/ Web Support	-	56%

## **Recommendations:**

- 1. Employee Tracking.** In order to identify the proper audience to offer training, coordinate with HR to identify employees within information technology related positions across campus. Such tracking would assist in many ways, including information distribution. Budgetary repercussions are minimal.
- 2. New Employee Orientation Program.** In cooperation with Human Resources' New Employee Orientation, develop a program which would introduce new hires within information technology to campus resources and contacts. Such an orientation should include introduction to divisions within Information Services such as Administrative Services, Network Services, and the Knight Library. Budgetary repercussions are minimal.
- 3. Expert Panel / Peer Consulting.** Develop a peer network to facilitate communication among IT staff. Such a network should include a group of previously approved people chosen as experts in specific areas. These people should agree to serve (with supervisory approval) for a defined time period and specify the best way to reach them (e.g., phone, email, etc.). Budgetary repercussions are minimal.
- 4. Conference Sharing.** Create a venue for those who have recently returned from conference to share the knowledge and materials they have acquired with others who are interested. This would allow for a wider dissemination of information at minimal cost. This should also include a

mechanism for listing feedback about various conferences attended and should assist the staff in deciding which conference is the best use of limited resources. Budgetary repercussions are minimal.

- 5. Yearly University Sponsored Micro-Conference.** Hold an annual day-long conference that draws on expertise from within the university and includes an outside trainer, structured to allow information technology support staff to make the best use of the limited time available for learning. The expertise from within the university could be identified via a call for proposals that would be evaluated by a planning committee. The external trainer would be recommended by the same committee and sponsored by several departments, for example, IS and the Library. Budgetary repercussions are approximately \$1,500 per event depending on the speaker.
- 6. Lunch and Learn Sessions.** Offer a monthly “Lunch and Learn” session which features an IT employee who has a specific area of expertise on a specific issue. He/she would give a 45-minute talk over the lunch hour. Topics could be identified using a website that solicits suggestions. Budgetary repercussions are minimal.
- 7. Standard Training Courses at the UO.** Hire a speaker or consultant to present training for UO IT staff on a topic selected by a planning committee for the event. Sharing the cost among interested departments would be less expensive than sending several staff members to the same training out of state. Budgetary repercussions would vary based on how many departments expressed interest and cost of the speaker.
- 8. Centralized Backup Staff.** Provide back-up support for IT staff who attend training. A frequently cited obstacle to participating in IT training comes from staff in departments with only one information technology support person. Time away from their jobs, even for a short conference or training presentation, leaves departments without technical support should problems occur. If Information Services staff were available to provide backup for these absences, the employee could furnish a system summary of critical needs so immediate crises could be resolved. This support may assist IT staff members and their supervisors in arranging for professional development. Additional information would be required to assess budgetary repercussions.
- 9. Management Encouragement.** Ensure that managers of IT staff understand and articulate the benefits of updating skills through regular professional development. A consistent message from university leadership that underscores the link between faculty’s successful use of technology in teaching with strong IT staff skills will be imperative in obtaining support from departments for these initiatives. Budgetary repercussions are minimal.
- 10. Vendor Briefings.** Promote an open line of communication between vendors and IT staff to help the latter stay abreast of developments in technology. Too often, vendor communication occurs with those who make the budgetary decisions, rather than the IT staff working with the software. Including IT support staff in vendor briefing opportunities and regularly scheduling such opportunities will strengthen career options and job knowledge. Budgetary repercussions are substantial with approximately \$1,500 per person being required to attend each briefing.
- 11. Central Organization of Professional Development Opportunities.** Establish an organizational structure for IT professional development activities. In order to effectively organize professional development opportunities, it is recommended that either a committee or a person, under direction of a committee, have the responsibility of staffing the above recommendations and instituting administrative processes to promote long-term follow through and success of the recommendations. This will include collaboration with Human Resources, Library, Information Services, and information technology staff across campus to ensure that meaningful professional development events are identified and presented. Potential activities will involve soliciting presentation topics regularly, planning training opportunities, and communicating offerings widely on campus. Budgetary repercussions in the form of staffing would be incurred.