

## Dialogue Session: Professional Growth and Service

September 9, 2019

### Whitepaper

#### Title of the Dialogue Session: Professional Growth and Service

Staff and faculty are the key to providing an engaging and enriching learning experience for our students. How do we as employees ensure professional growth, create compelling learning experiences, and provide stellar service to our students? How do we continually support an environment that engages and empowers faculty and staff to become active agents in their own professional growth and career development, develop and maintain a culture of competency, skill and knowledge enhancement, and reinforce that we are a community of lifelong learners? This session addressed these questions and provided insights from a panel of internal and external stakeholders.

#### Summary of the Background of the Discussion

All employees of the College need to embrace the concept of lifelong learning to remain relevant in their jobs. Several key statements were made during the session:

- Common competencies or skills for all employees such as emotional intelligence or exposure to the SOAR (Flight of the Hawks) system map that students move through while at Harper may be helpful for all employees. Have those been identified? Should they be?
- Similarly, skills and competencies are needed when working in a global environment. Have these been identified? What would they be?
- Obstacles such as time and cost prevent some employees from pursuing professional development opportunities. How can these be mitigated and is there a cultural change needed to ensure professional development is encouraged by all managers?
- Common professional development experiences may be helpful for all employees. Should there be standard and regularly scheduled professional development opportunities offered campus-wide? Can this be done in groups, rather than campus-wide?
- Non-traditional forms of training should be considered such as online programs curated via sites such as lynda.com. Is this feasible at Harper?
- Other forms of training such as mentoring, cross training and job shadowing are effective professional development methods. Should Harper explore ways to institutionalize them?

#### Discussion of the Topic

Below is a summary of the statements made by the panelists in response to the questions asked:

##### What does professional development look like?

Education is the key way we can discover and expand our knowledge, especially areas in which we are unaware of just how much we don't know.

There are three basic considerations:

1. What a person wants to do or to be in life
2. What opportunities are available to that person
3. The skills the person currently has or wants to have

When #3 intersects with # 1 and #2, one finds the sweet spot. But this is not always clear. Therefore, every opportunity to learn is valuable, whether it's in a formal class, a workshop, a project, or by learning something from others.

An institution can help or guide its employees, but employees need to seek professional development on their own as well.

Professional development is important not only in developing the individual employee, but also in improving the bottom line for the organization. The more employees learn, the better they are at their jobs. Professional development helps employees improve performance on the job.

### **Why is professional development important to a successful career?**

Student advising has changed and professional development opportunities help us know what is working, what is not working, and what to look at going forward.

Professional development is important in developing employee leadership skills so we can be not only more effective on our campus, but also outside of our campus in representing Harper College.

Educators are experts in their fields. For faculty it is important to push our limits, expand our expertise. We can take a graduate course, read a journal, or go to a conference to find ways to improve or expand our expertise.

As employees, it is important to improve our competency and expertise. When an employee improves, that employee improves his or her department as well as the organization. Employee retention is another benefit for an institution that offers professional development. It's also important to find ways to measure employee development and its impact.

### **What type of professional development have you done, and what do you want to use it for?**

So much is changing in our world. We work in a much more global and diverse environment. We need to know about and understand the challenges around diversity, equity, and inclusion. We need to ask how we can be better leaders in this environment. We need to ask how we can use education as a way to promote inclusion for others. My professional development has helped me enjoy more teaching, training, and student interaction as well as learn how to create more engaging learning environments.

### **What benefit is it to students that faculty obtain professional development?**

When we are more proficient and innovative in our jobs, we can better provide services to our students. We try to be more student-centered and better at problem solving. Recently, we collaborated on innovating our student onboarding experience.

I am working on my doctorate as well as having just obtained a Social Justice Leadership certification at Harper. Both have helped me be confident as a leader. They have given me tools and also connections to mentors to help me create a more realistic training room or workshop. My doctoral studies give me the administrative background knowledge, but the Harper leadership-based program helps me center on Harper policies and also on the population at Harper so I can better serve them.

I work with students on a one-on-one basis. I need to develop empathy and the ability to hear what is not being said. I also need to help students wade through the red tape and the entire registration process. Because of this, professional development in emotional intelligence, empathy, listening, and customer service are so important they might need to be deemed mandatory.

Time and human resource constraints often prevent us from participating in professional development. If we had more online training available, we could access it on our own time and more professionals could participate. That would be beneficial.

I participated in a faculty international field seminar in Central America and took a course there. In my profession we work with students on personal issues and sometimes my biases affect how I work with students. This was an area where I felt I could grow.

### **What are some effective options for professional development?**

Online professional development can be effective, but it is better when integrated with other types of training. When people are asked how they learn something, many respond with, "I Google it or I watch YouTube." The reality is there are some good resources out there, and a lot is free, but some of it is not worthwhile. We pick the best of the best, and we curate these into play lists. We have curated playlists for things like Project Management. But we also include additional resources such as reading lists. Mentorship and job shadowing are also valuable.

### **What are some obstacles to obtaining professional development?**

A major obstacle is the cost and the time required. We get professional development funds, but those funds get used up pretty quickly, especially for conferences as many are expensive and are not in the Chicago area. It would help to have more professional development here on campus and have it scheduled at dates and times that work with our schedules.

People see professional development as supplemental. Many already have a busy work schedule, and some have other responsibilities such as families to care for. Some people just do not have as much time to devote to it.

Harper offers a lot of professional development opportunities, but not a lot of people are interested in taking advantage of them. Perhaps a culture change needs to happen to create value so that professional development becomes an actual part of our jobs.

### **What is a reasonable expectation that employees should have of their organization to create a pathway to professional development?**

Learning doesn't stop at graduation; it is a lifelong thing. Today, people are hungry for learning and growth opportunities. If an organization doesn't provide these, it will not be able to attract the best employees.

I'm not sure an institution can provide a pathway for its employees. In reality, individuals' pathways are fluid and people may advance by moving in different directions and in positions they might not have anticipated. It's more important that the organization provide time away from work for people to learn, and opportunities and funding for professional development.

Mentorship, cross training, and job shadowing are all low-cost ways to offer professional development. Managers need to capture needs and develop appropriate goals to boost productivity in their departments.

**What is unique about Harper's role in serving students through its employees obtaining professional development?**

Harper has teachers and administrators who are very concerned about students. We also have resources, but we tend to get comfortable and complacent in our positions instead of continually looking for how we can improve ourselves and our processes. We have overlap, and if our departments communicated better, it would be beneficial to students who are trying to navigate our system.

Professional development increases our knowledge on the technical side, but it also helps us have a better perspective about possible cultural or diversity issues.

Harper is totally committed to our students and their success. Professional development increases our potency in being able to help our students be more successful.

**What do you plan to do personally near term and long term for professional development?**

Short term and long term are the same for me. I'm comfortable with what I do, so I'm looking for ways to challenge myself. Without professional development, my job gets stale. I'm looking at experiential learning, especially outdoors and am planning on attending a conference about this.

Short term I plan to learn more about Banner 9. I'd also like to shadow my coworkers to learn more about what they do. I can better help my coworkers and serve our students if I learn more about enrollment services, admissions, and financial aid.

Short term I want to learn more about human resources and add more to my responsibilities. I'd like to get a holistic view of how we serve people at our university and see what new things I can do. I'd like to do more teaching, especially in science. I learn from my children who are in high school and in college. They challenge me, and I work on keeping an open mind.

Short term I'd like to get through my doctoral program. Long term I'd like to learn how to be a better researcher.

<b>Audience Discussion of the Topic</b>
---

Below is a summary of statements made by the panelists in response to audience comments and questions:

**Audience comment:** With teaching and shared governance responsibilities, it's hard to fit professional development in without burnout. There is a difference between encouraging versus pressuring people to engage in professional development on top of all their other responsibilities.

**Answer:** Because time is limited, a manager may want to find e-learning opportunities for people based on a need in the department.

**Audience comment:** My time at home is already taken up with grading papers and work I bring home, so e-learning is not a good solution for me.

**Answer:** In our department, my colleagues fill in for me so I can attend a conference. However, I understand this is not always possible in every department. The dean should sit down with new faculty members to work on a professional development plan for them and then give them some freedom to avail themselves of it.

**Audience question:** Pedagogical methodology is one aspect of professional development, and it's easier to find and less expensive than professional development in one's own field. How can Harper help me with both? We are encouraged to do both, but it's easier for Harper to offer me the pedagogical methodology.

**Answer:** Experts in a field would know best where to get new knowledge. The institution wouldn't need to research, but instead encourage and support a person and help him or her with planning and scheduling on how to accomplish it. A manager can offer support through providing money or resources.

**Audience comment:** I was on the employee skills team for Harper's prior strategic plan. For the first year, we were thinking outside the box on what we need as employees. We finally coalesced on SOAR (Search, Onboard, Advance, Realize) for all Harper employees. We decided that all new employees, regardless of their position at Harper, should find out how they could support SOAR for our students. With this new strategic plan, we need to look at what we might have missed or not as yet thought of.

We hope this is the year in adult education to find ways to support the most vulnerable in our communities: the underemployed, the underrepresented, the second language learners, the undocumented, and those who just didn't make the cut to get into the career pathways. My goal is that all employees understand there are people in our communities who are not making it to the R part of SOAR. We need to look at how we can all look at helping them SOAR.

**Answer:** Honestly, this is the first I've heard of SOAR. How we communicate as an institution is vital to the success of any strategic plan.

**Audience question:** I work with students who have disabilities. A part of my job is to think of multiple solutions to a problem such as dyslexia. How can we better engage students with disabilities? I've noticed that people with or without disabilities learn in many different manners. Some are more visual, others more auditory. They also have preferences. For example, closed captioning facilitates learning, and it is more effective in an environment that is solely auditory.

**Answer:** People have different ways in which they learn best. My experience in the corporate world is that learning styles need to be taken into consideration. We took something traditionally done through reading and made it available through audio or video. Much more needs to be explored.

**Answer:** Students with disabilities often tend to fall through cracks. We need to encourage students to talk with instructors about their needs. My comfort level is higher when I can provide accommodations for students who need them.

**Answer:** We have populations not addressed in our strategic plan. We need to address issues as they come up. Are we getting the feedback we need to address student issues, especially with regard to different learning styles?

**Audience question:** I was co-chair of the Stewardship Committee last year. We need professional development, but we also need to establish priorities. If we are going to do more professional development, what are we going to stop doing to make that possible?

**Answer:** Whatever the initiative is, we need to make sure that it's sustainable. Some initiatives we chose in the past didn't always pay off. How can we measure things like how getting out in the community directly affects serving our students? Are these initiatives costing more than we are getting in return? We need to know how to measure this.

**Answer:** Some employees such as faculty are not as able to take time for professional development as others. Managers need to figure out how employees can manage their loads and also get professional development.

**Audience question:** A college president I once knew had a sign, “Help People Grow.” We have an obligation to offer our employees a chance to grow, and employees have an obligation to take advantage of opportunities they are given. How do I develop for the next thing, especially when I’m unsure what it is I’m developing for?

**Answer:** At my university we have talked about strengthening our managers. Sometimes resources need to be realigned in order to do so. Networking or connecting with other people in a purposeful way can help us to find out what next steps might be with regard to our own professional development.

**Answer:** When employee and manager have a good relationship and work together, the future becomes clearer.