MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
Classified Staff Organizations

Pooled Resources for the Provision of
Professional Development and Training for Classified Staff – **Further Study**

**Executive Summary:**

In November, 2005, the Board of Regents responded favorably to the MUS classified staff representatives’ (“Senates”) proposal to further study the feasibility of implementing the Pooled Resources concept. The Senates continued inter-campus and inter-disciplinary discussion, and enthusiasm for this project remains strong.

Pooling existing MUS professional development/training resources and opportunities, and offering MUS classified staff access to them via a central web site remains feasible and desirable, with the following advantages as it:

- Exhibits true MUS collaboration
- Maximizes full potential of underutilized MUS resources
- Offers strong recruitment and retention potential
- Improves staff efficiency and effectiveness
- Services a known need (as demonstrated, for example, by the professional development, training, and career advancement aspects of 9 of the 23 classified tactics of MSU’s Five Year Vision)
- Preserves institutional knowledge via staff retained, for instance, through increased opportunity or job satisfaction resulting from professional growth
- Enhances the complete student experience, through heightened staff effectiveness, thus impacting student retention
- Places the responsibility of training at the level of need, with potential provision of any topic
- Provides equal access to all staff
- Utilizes various training media (written, in person, on-line), providing for most learning preferences
- Presents potential for community involvement

This is an evolving concept; a “living” project where the success of the facility is as reliant upon user engagement as user satisfaction is upon the richness of the content.

The necessary web site can be simply created, and easily maintained, incurring only initial web development costs. Well organized program coordination will be crucial, and alternative ways forward are suggested on page 7.

**The Senates request the Board of Regents’, or their appointed liaison’s, input and advice into the project’s preferred direction from this point.**
Progress Towards the Implementation of a Pooled Resources Facility for the Provision of Professional Development and Training for Classified Staff

**History:**
Following informal discussion with the Regents, in July 2005, classified staff representatives (Senates) developed the idea of a central, web-based forum of Pooled Resources to provide professional development and training opportunities for classified staff.

Advantages of the concept are consistent with Board of Regents’ Strategic Goals and Objectives: improved recruitment and retention, elevated productivity and client service; a leadership role for MUS in employee self-education, life-long learning, and full utilization of System resources; and cost and programming efficiency (please see the Senates’ initial report to the Board of Regents, dated November 1, 2005).

The Senates’ Perception Of the Concept (11/1/05)

- User input - needs and training evaluations
- Links to MUS course offerings (online and on campus)
- Listservs of specialty groups
- Self-help instructional materials
- Speakers’ Bureau of trainers

Web based platform

Program content provided from within MUS - employee expertise, and existing PD&T materials.

The 11/1/05 report’s recommended next steps were:

a. For the Senates to take the lead in forming an Implementation Committee, comprising appropriate participants from each campus, including representatives from each Senate and from the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

b. For the Implementation Committee to be charged with identifying the technical methods and requirements (including associated software, hardware and manpower needs) for the successful creation, and long-term maintenance, of the web site. Also with developing a realistic schedule of cost related to the site’s creation, on-going maintenance, and support.

c. For the Senates to assume long-term responsibility for gathering user feedback and for making relevant recommendations regarding content.

At the November Board of Regents meeting, the Commissioner of Higher Education and Regents were enthusiastic about the potential for centralized Pooled Resources, authorized the formation of an Implementation Committee and charged the Senates with further researching the hurdles involved in turning the concept into a reality. Commissioner Stearns invited the Senates to attend the next meeting of MUS Human Resources directors, which occurred on January 27, 2006.
MOST RECENT INFORMATION

Since the November Board of Regents meeting, the Senates have continued to pursue the Pooled Resource concept on each campus, regularly communicating with each other. The Senates met in Helena, on January 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2006 (coinciding with the MUS Human Resources directors’ gathering) where discussion focused on perceived hurdles to be overcome in the creation of a Pooled Resources facility, the next steps to progressing the concept, and the potential composition and charge of the Implementation Committee (please see “b” in “History”, above).

Consolidating the input received from Director of Labor Relations, Kevin McCrae, and the Human Resources directors, with prior research, the Senates perceived that the responsibility of the Implementation Committee could largely be discharged in a short series of meetings with technical and adult education specialists. These were held on February 6\textsuperscript{th}.

Participants in Implementation Discussions:

The “Senates”:
- Staff Association, UM Western, Dillon
  - Karen Throckmorton, k.throckmorton@umwestern.edu
- Staff Representatives, MSU Northern, Havre
  - Christine Muller, cmuller@msun.edu
  - Julie Strobel, jstrobel@msun.edu
- Staff Senate, Montana State University, Billings
  - Janna Myers, webmaster@msubillings.edu
  - Kelli Grantham, kgrantham@msubillings.edu
- Staff Senate, University of Montana, Missoula
  - Michelle Crowe, michelle.crowe@umontana.edu
  - Shelley Hiniker, shelley.hiniker@umontana.edu
- CEPAC, Montana State University, Bozeman
  - Genevieve Burmeister, gburmeister@montana.edu
  - Michelle Larsen, mlarsen@montana.edu
  - Sara France, sfrance@montana.edu

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education:
- Director of Labor Relations, Kevin McRae.

Human Resources Directors:
- University of Montana – Western, Helena, Missoula;
- Montana State University – Northern, Great Falls, Billings, Bozeman.

University of Montana, Missoula:
- Campus Operations Coordinator with responsibility for business services training & procedures; Computer Support Specialist with responsibility for web development & maintenance; Web Systems & Development Manager for Information Technology; Director, Applications & Media Development for Information Technology and member of the portal project.

Montana State University, Northern:
- Director of Information Technology Services;
  - Systems/Network/Web Manager; Systems Administrator;
  - Facilitator of On-Line Learning.

Montana State University, Bozeman:
- Computing Consultant with responsibility for listservs;
  - Assistant Director, BTC Educational Technology Services;
  - Associate Professor (Graduate Adult Education Program), Education.
Findings to Date:

Having consulted with human resources, technical, and adult education specialists, the Senates report the following findings:

1. Creating the Facility
   A single, web-based platform providing access to professional development and training resources, as described in the Senates’ report dated November 1, 2005, could be created and operated using existing hardware and software.

   It would be most simply and efficiently built
   i. using an Index of Resources format
   ii. with campus specific data managed through organization rather than authentication
   iii. providing for the future both in terms of expansion, and utilization of emerging technologies (eg the Portal)
   iv. to be maintained with minimal IT expertise
   v. promoting MUS collaboration and providing user ownership of the facility
   vi. incurring cost of initial creation only.

   Considerations in Creating the Facility:
   - user preference
   - inter-campus communications around technical commonalities
   - security requirements – what are we protecting and from whom?
   - consultation with agencies proposing similar inter-campus combinations of technologies (e.g. Wellness)
   - incorporation of monitoring aids to track user activity/preference (and sharing outcomes with users as part of program “ownership”)
   - branding

2. Populating the Facility
   Initial inquiry reveals a considerable amount of potentially appropriate material, in various forms, within different departments across the MUS. However, since user satisfaction is key to the success of a program of this kind, the facility’s integrity is most likely maintained through launching a smaller site richly populated with materials of demonstrated staff and departmental need. This is an evolving concept, reliant upon on-going user involvement.

   Considerations in Populating the Facility
   - Know Your Institution (8 campuses) - whom is the program serving, and what do they need?
     - Needs/user preference assessment. Focus groups on each campus generating survey questions, to provide qualitative and quantitative data for prioritizing needs/preferences in PD&T of benefit on the job
   - Inventory of pre-existing resources
   - Attainable time frames for providing services, maintaining user interest and program momentum
   - User needs will evolve, requiring the program content to change and grow. It’s not a “set up and forget” concept.
3. **Managing the Pooled Resources Program**

As determined above, this is an evolving concept, reliant upon perpetual user involvement. The success of a Pooled Resources facility of this kind will be dependent upon the program’s ability to:

i. always provide appropriate, current and effective content, in a user-friendly manner

ii. promote the service among staff, supervisors and departments, capture and maintain user interest

iii. carry the sponsorship of the MUS rather than any one campus.

*Considerations for Managing the Pooled Resources Program:*

- on-going needs assessing and collection of user feedback
- strategy for providing for a proven need should this be unavailable within the expertise of the MUS under the “training as a system-wide goal” philosophy (please see 11/1/05 report, 3.a.).
Summary:

- The Web Site
  - simply created incurring only initial web development costs (using existing hardware/software)
  - incorporating user preferences
  - allowing for expansion and incorporation of advancing technologies
  - carrying MUS endorsement/branding
  - easily maintained without IT expertise

- Program Concept
  - a “living” project comprising PD&T Pooled Resources identified and maintained as a result of user ownership and engagement. For the program to be credible it should start small and be populated with known user preferences, requiring:
    i. regular user liaison – initial input and on-going feedback
    ii. well coordinated management of the site and contents
    iii. program publicity, particularly around its launch
    iv. motivated, consistent coordination of this evolving program.

Conclusion:
Pooling existing MUS professional development/training resources and opportunities, and offering MUS classified staff access to them via a central web site remains feasible and desirable, with the following advantages as it:

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- Maximizes full potential of underutilized MUS resources
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Much enthusiasm for the project exists on all campuses, not least among the Senates. Based upon their networking and researching the Pooled Resources concept over the last six months, and their experience effectively harnessing the interest exhibited to date, the Senates conclude:

The web site, hosting access to Pooled Resources, is easily created and maintained, and web development will incur little financial outlay. An inventory of existing resources is necessary. For the site to be credible it should be designed and populated utilizing known user preferences, rather than simply loading the entire pre-existing inventory. The more credible the site, the more
ownership the staff will claim thus sustaining the momentum necessary to the program’s evolution.

Determining initial user preferences will require needs assessing on each campus. Initiating both the inventory and needs assessments will trigger user momentum. This momentum is necessary to the credibility of the program and, once triggered, must be sustained. Therefore, the program must be seen to progress in a timely and well coordinated manner.

While the Senates, restricted by their current composition of voluntary, term-limited memberships, already maximizing available administrative support, cannot provide the necessary program coordination, possible ways forward may include one, or a combination, of the following:

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<tr>
<th>Possible Solution</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Employee investment&lt;br&gt;• Early ownership of the project by the Program Coordinator&lt;br&gt;• Project continuity&lt;br&gt;• Project momentum&lt;br&gt;• Potential melding of this job description with provision of other MUS needs</td>
<td>• Financial commitment to a potentially unproven program</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Requires less commitment by MUS&lt;br&gt;• Position could become permanent as deemed appropriate in the future&lt;br&gt;• Project momentum</td>
<td>The temporary nature of the position risks a:&lt;br&gt;• weak applicant pool due to temporary nature of position&lt;br&gt;• less motivated employee&lt;br&gt;• turnover/loss of continuity</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Minimal financial outlay for MUS (only, perhaps with respect to supervision)&lt;br&gt;• Ultimate MUS collaboration with the involvement of academic opportunities</td>
<td>• Uncertain availability of suitable students&lt;br&gt;• Turnover/loss of continuity&lt;br&gt;• Loss of project momentum&lt;br&gt;• Provision of a supervisor suitably engaged in the project</td>
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Next Step:
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