

MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
Classified Staff Organizations

Pooled Resources for the Provision of
Professional Development and Training for Classified Staff

Executive Summary:

Pooling of MUS resources for the provision of professional development and training was one of the popular ideas to emerge from a meeting of classified staff representatives (Senates) and Regents, in July. The overall message delivered by each campus, via the Senates' exploration of this concept, is that a central, web-based forum of Pooled Resources is feasible and desirable within the Montana University System. Further, it could be relatively economically developed and, eventually, expanded to include areas of expertise and interest outside the classified realm.

Following some basic exploration of the feasibility of centralized Pooled Resources, with the parties listed below, and further discussion among themselves, the Senates submit these preliminary findings.

Assuming that the concepts described within this report are acceptable, the Senates respectfully recommend the next step: Board of Regents' approval of the formation of an Implementation Committee (described below).

A Summary of Classified Exploration of the Concept of Pooled Resources for the Provision of Professional Development and Training for Classified Staff

History:

In July, 2005 classified staff organizations from across the Montana University System (MUS), collectively referred to here as the “Senates”, discussed issues of classified recruitment and retention with the Board of Regents. Pooling of MUS resources for the provision of professional development and training was one of the popular ideas to emerge.

The Senates have consulted administrators, human resource experts, and information technology, and other specialists on their individual campuses, gathering input on the feasibility of a central resource for classified professional development and training. It is worth noting that each campus’ inquiries met with great enthusiasm, and encouragement of this concept.

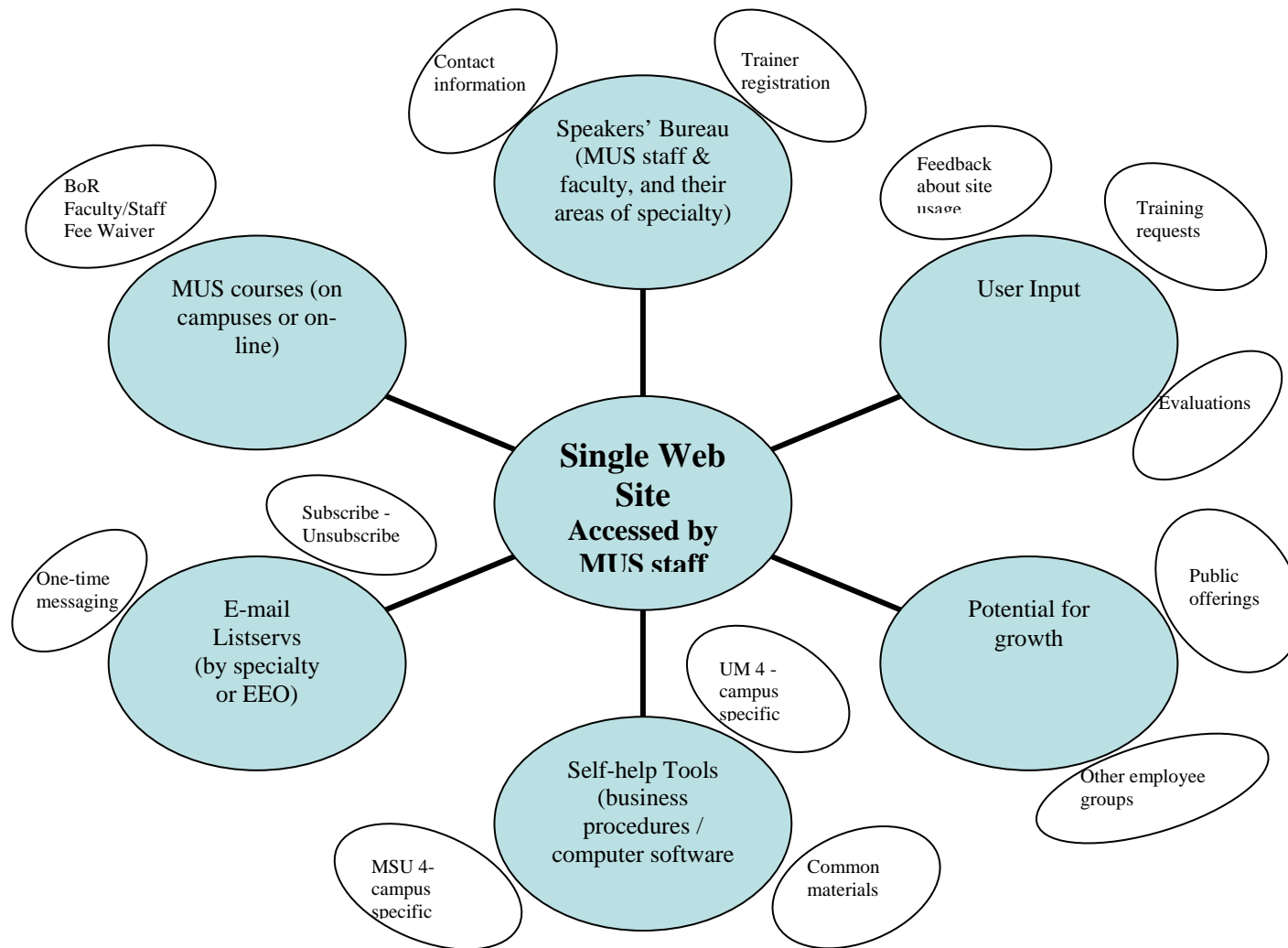
After exploration and development of their findings, and incorporating feedback from Kevin McRae, the Director of Labor Relations, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Senates now have pleasure in submitting this report. We offer assistance and cooperation to the Regents, as appropriate, in the further research and pursuance of this principle.

Participants in Discussion of the Principles of Pooled Resources:

The “Senates”:	Staff Association, UM Western, Dillon Staff Representatives, MSU Northern, Havre Staff Senate, Montana State University, Billings Staff Senate, University of Montana, Missoula CEPAC, Montana State University, Bozeman
University of Montana, Missoula:	Banner Training specialists; Human Resources professionals; Financial experts.
Montana State University, Northern:	Director, Human Resources.
Montana State University, Bozeman:	Director of Planning & Analysis/Chief Information Officer; Director and staff, Personnel & Payroll Services; Computing Consultant with responsibility for listservs; Associate Dean of the Library; Assistant Director, BTC Educational Technology Services.
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education:	Director of Labor Relations, Kevin McRae.

Potential Advantages to MUS of Pooled Resources (consistent with the Regents’ Strategic Goals and Objectives):

- Improved recruitment and retention, staff efficiency and effectiveness through professional development and training, and elevated productivity and client service.
- A leadership role for MUS in employee self-education and full utilization of System resources.
- Promotion of a culture of lifelong learning and professional development for employees.
- Cost and labor sharing, negating some campus budgetary constraints.
- One solution to an institutional-level training dilemma: how to customize programming such that everyone’s needs are met? This concept recognizes the individual’s responsibility, and places the choice of training at the departmental level.



Senates' Perception of a Pooled Resource Facility

Senates' Perception of a Pooled Resource Facility:

A single, web-based platform, available to all MUS classified staff, with the capability of providing access to:

1. Pre-existing, campus-specific, self-help instructional materials (e.g. business procedures)
2. A center for listservs of specialty groups
3. A "speakers' bureau" of trainers and their areas of specialty, comprising current MUS employees
4. Links to MUS course descriptions (on campus and on-line), Board of Regents Faculty/Staff Fee Waiver Policy information, and enrollment instruction
5. A forum through which to log end users' training needs and requests
6. A venue for user evaluations/reports of experience in trainings offered via the system

Considerations:

The entire function could be organized on a single web platform

- A. *Associated expenses would likely include initial web development, on-going site maintenance, and necessary software/hardware costs,. However, were it possible to house the facilities on existing commercial list/web servers, such as are available at MSU Billings and/or Bozeman, the latter might be minimized.*
- B. *The Pooled Resources' principle of utilizing pre-existing materials and an expert pool comprising current employees should prove cost efficient. It offers potential for a rich training and professional development experience without many of the traditional hindrances heretofore experienced by several campuses in providing programming at the institutional level. The Senates are aware of budgetary and manpower pressures experienced system-wide, and so celebrate the benefits afforded by this concept.*

1. Pre-existing, campus-specific, self-help instructional materials (e.g. business procedures)
 - a. *Preferred methods of provision of campus-specific instruction, and the depth of related on-line material, vary across the MUS. The Senates acknowledge such diversity and are not recommending the instigation or expansion of such on-line facilities for the inception of this web site.*
 - b. *Access via the central web site should be clearly campus-specific to avoid "cross training" with inappropriate material*
 - c. *Such pre-existing materials as are appropriate for sharing among all campuses (e.g. computer software trainings) may require access authority if currently housed on secure sites.*

2. A center for listservs
 - By specialty for immediate answers to questions not requiring an entire training
 - By EEO category
 - "Click" methods to self subscribe/unsubscribe
 - Non-members "click" to send one-time questions to a listserv
 - a. *Spam reduction might be achieved through access limitation (to MUS e-mail addresses only)*
 - b. *Self-subscription to any listserv could eliminate excess or unwanted email traffic, but would require initiative on the part of the end user*
 - c. *Cost – see Consideration A, "Senates' Perception of a Pooled Resource Facility", above*

3. A “speakers’ bureau” of trainers and their areas of specialty, derived from the staff, faculty, and administration of the MUS
 - a. *Cost. (i) The Senates suggest a philosophy of training as a System-wide goal, with trainers’ home departments giving release time, but employing departments covering transportation, meals, seminar materials etc. If enough trainers join the pool, demand could be spread. If the system is sufficiently utilized, training from one campus could be “a wash” with training from another. [If the “wash” philosophy is not adopted in all cases, review of the legality of additional compensation for service outside normal duties/hours might be appropriate]. (ii) Trainings could offer a possible revenue source if opened to other State agencies, or the public. [Non-competition codes may be applicable in this case].*
 - b. *Attention should be paid, in any training, to campus-specific protocols, and end users should not perceive a training to take the place of the appropriate campus “authority” advice on policy matters.*
 - c. *How to verify trainer qualifications/capabilities? Three possibilities lend themselves: (i) commencing the “speaker’s bureau” with personnel known to be suitably qualified, followed by word of mouth referral; (ii) a system-wide survey of faculty, staff and administrators incorporating declaration of credentials; (iii) evaluation of “speakers” based upon user feedback collected regularly following each presentation.*
4. Links to MUS course descriptions (on campus and on-line), Board of Regents Faculty/Staff Fee Waiver Policy information, and enrollment instruction
5. A forum through which to log end users’ training needs and requests
 - a. *Pre-scheduled trainings would benefit from grass roots input as to needs and interests.*
 - b. *Users’ input regarding needs and requests could facilitate “recruitment” of further specialty listservs or trainers.*
6. A venue for user evaluations/reports of experience in trainings offered via the system
 - a. *This feature could provide positive publicity and encouragement promoting increased use of the facility.*
 - b. *The Senates recommend establishing a process for ensuring user evaluations are appropriate for publication from a liability standpoint. One possibility is provision, on the web site, of an on-line evaluation form using a numerical scale. If textual comments are invited, these might first be electronically submitted to an “editor’s” e-mail rather than published direct.*

Ensuring User Satisfaction:

The Senates are aware of the importance of any potential Pooled Resource site meeting the needs of the end user. Considerations in this regard might be:

- a. Phasing in the facility
 1. First going live with, for example, pre-existing resources (campus-specific materials and/or specialty listservs)
 2. Advertising resources yet to be provided (“Coming Soon!”) and indicating realistic live dates
 3. Soliciting on-line input into the desirability of each (“What would you like to see? Which is better? Would you use?” etc)

- b. Gathering regular user feedback
 - 1. Why did you visit this site?
 - 2. Were your needs met?
 - 3. How could the facility be improved?
- c. Effective and regular advertising of the facility's existence.

Next Steps:

For the project to proceed, the Senates respectfully offer the following suggestions:

- 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.