Chapter 88

Benefits of Internal Professional Development for Academic Librarians

Carissa Tomlinson
Towson University, USA

ABSTRACT

While often overlooked, there are many benefits of in-house professional development programs for academic librarians. This is especially true as the roles of academic librarians continue to evolve and change. This chapter argues that internal professional development not only helps academic librarians share their varied skills, tools, and practices with institutional colleagues, but also improves employee morale, collegiality, and organizational culture. Additionally, by structuring an internal professional development program using a peer-learning model, librarians gain a sense of community while seeing value in each librarian's individual knowledge. Also, peer learning can be a mechanism for institutional knowledge management and the transfer of institutional memory through intergenerational and cross job function learning. In addition to exploring the evolving nature of the academic librarian and the importance of professional development as peer learning in the context of the local institution, this chapter will describe in detail one university library's internal professional development program for librarians.

INTRODUCTION

In our role as academic librarians, we often seek outlets for professional growth and education. Additionally, our administrators, universities, and sometimes our tenure process often require such professional development. In this pursuit,

we often look to our professional organizations as well as experts in our fields outside of our own institutions for such development. While attending conferences and other external continuing education programming is important for library innovation and professional growth, looking inward at your own library colleagues' varied skills and resources can be equally as important for many reasons. Librarians of today come in a variety of

flavors; sharing our unique knowledge across our own library community through peer teaching and learning can help us better assist our patrons through increased knowledge and improved referral. Not only can librarians learn a variety of skills, tools, and practices from each other, but encouraging these regular, organized discussions and programs can actually improve employee morale, collegiality, and organizational culture. Internal professional development, especially in a peer learning model (rather than trainer-trainee) gives librarians a sense of community while emphasizing value in each librarian's individual knowledge. It can be a mechanism for institutional knowledge management and the transfer of institutional memory through intergenerational and cross job function learning. Additionally, because participants in internal professional development share a context for their knowledge building, (i.e. the issues and cultural specifics of their library and university), their development programming can be more targeted and thus their professional growth more meaningful. Internal professional development can be accomplished in a variety of ways including workshops, seminars, directed reading, journal clubs, peer mentoring, and more. They can be accomplished in-person, online or a combination of the two.

In addition to exploring the evolving nature of the academic librarian and the importance of professional development as peer learning in the context of the local institution, this paper will describe in detail one university library's professional development program for librarians. Furthermore, this example will offer practical ideas for both librarians and library administrators interested in developing such a program.

BACKGROUND

Many academic librarians have unique positions compared to typical academic staff. Often we have faculty status with some sort of tenure process. As faculty, especially when in a tenure track, we are expected to stay professionally active. An ongoing commitment to development generally is in our nature as well as in our position descriptions. We do not simply have jobs, we have professions and wish to continually learn and grow within our professions and organizations. Because of this, academic librarians do not usually need much incentive to seek out professional opportunities. However, much of the focus tends to be within our professional organizations and other external means to learn and grow. These methods are not to be discredited. Many of the ideas we can teach each other in-house are ideas that we have learned outside of our own walls. Innovative ideas coming from different organizations with different cultures are extremely important to spark change. Internal professional development does not replace external development; instead they should be seen as complementary activities. External professional development is very important even in financially difficult times. On the same note, internal professional development is equally as important even in financially prosperous times. However, it seems that little attention is paid to the importance and significance of internal professional development except, perhaps, in terms of financial savings.

It should be noted, that while sometimes used interchangeably, this paper focuses on library "development" rather than library "training." While training is crucial to institutional success, its focus is on imparting skills and knowledge as a specific "means to an end" (Fitzgerald, 1992, p. 81). It is short term and does not focus on creating change and growth in the organization or library profession. Development seeks to impart skills and knowledge that is ongoing and transformative (Fitzgerald, 1992). Internal library training or any job training is generally commonplace as new people are hired or positions are changed. However, *professional development* as defined here, especially for librarians, often takes place outside the library or is conducted by a person from outside the institution. Even when conducted

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