

Recommendations:

The results of this survey affirm the need for consistent professional development opportunities for Allegheny's staff and administrative employees, focusing especially on technical skills and leadership development; however, there is a perceived lack of value or priority placed on professional development by the institution, and a lack of clarity about available resources. We recommend the establishment of professional development expectations and tracks for employees including mandatory training, perhaps through the creation of a policy or explanatory section in the handbook. Additionally, we recommend that all employees responsible for performance reviews receive training about giving reviews and identifying professional development needs, as well as clear campus-wide guidelines about resourcing and approving training. Finally, we recommend a learning gap audit regarding current technology and systems to identify the specific training needs, as well as a provision of a series of leadership development learning opportunities.

Methodology

A survey of Allegheny's administrators and staff was conducted in April 2021 by AAC and SAC to assess professional development needs, preferences and barriers for employees. The survey was delivered via email, the all-staff meeting agenda, and MyAllegheny and received 129 responses, representing 69% of staff and 36% of administrators. 56% of respondents have been employed by Allegheny for more than 5 years. 3 out of 4 have participated in professional development offered by the College.

Professional Development Needs

Our staff and administrators consistently identified that the key role and purpose for professional development was to improve collaboration across campus and develop tangible skills to apply to their work. Additionally, staff identified empowerment in their work as a critical outcome, while administrators identified growth in leadership capabilities.

When asked about previous professional development events that they felt worth attending again, respondents identified CPR training; Sustained Dialogues; summer training on Word, Excel and other software; DiSC assessments, and the Amma Marfo session about collaboration.

Overall, the top three preferred topics for professional development were technical skills, such as computer software, leadership skills and skills related to communication and interaction in the workplace. When looking at specific employee subsets, the following conclusions were identified:

- In their first five years of employment, all employees would value training to help them identify and prepare them for career advancement opportunities as well as knowledge and skill development in their field
- All staff identified that they would especially benefit from technical skill training, to grow in expertise about software and computer tools, while those with a longer tenure additionally identified workplace health and wellness, as well as emergency preparedness as professional development needs.
- All administrators highlighted soft skills associated with leadership development, communication and conflict management as top needs.

Logistical Preferences

A number of questions about logistics were asked to identify employee preferences. Multiple training times throughout the day and opportunities to do departmentally based training were overwhelmingly preferred. Monday's and Friday's would be the least preferred days of the week, and almost all feel they would not attend any evening times (especially if it is not a paid training). Summer and winter break were the most preferred times of year, and 70% of respondents prefer in person trainings. Three out of four preferred presentations no longer than 2 hours, while just over half would be more likely to attend if lunch was provided.

Identified Barriers

Top barriers to taking part in college-offered professional development were inconvenient times and a lack of interest in the subject matter. Additionally, results suggested a perceived lack of value and priority for professional development by the College, as only 5% noted that their department offered any recognition for participation and almost 50% identified barriers such as the inability to get release time, the lack of compensation for attending, that it was not mandatory, or that it had no implications for career or salary advancement.

Additional comments for consideration

Several ideas and recommendations were suggested by respondents that may merit further exploration and important to include in this report, including,

- Collaborate with fellow I-79 corridor institutions to provide meaningful professional development while sharing expenses
- Communicate more clearly and transparently about financial resources available for each employee and office, noting the need to support conference attendance
- Hold an internal 'conference' for delivering professional development programming over winter break while students are away
- Make professional development mandatory as part of hiring and retaining employees and provide consistent and expected spaces for employees to learn and grow together as part of our commitment to holistic student success and DEI