



Learning and Development Improvement Plan for The Undergraduate School of UMUC

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Introduction

University of Maryland University College (UMUC) is a public, open-access post-secondary institution. It is the University System of Maryland institution most focused on non-traditional learners, including adult and military learners. The Undergraduate School (TUS) at UMUC offers online and hybrid course leading to associate's and bachelor's degrees. As part of UMUC's Academic Affairs unit, TUS contributes to Academic Affairs' mission, goals, and objectives, stated below.

Academic Affairs Mission

Our dedicated faculty and staff deliver high quality, innovative teaching and learning experiences that are accessible, professionally relevant, and responsive to learners in a changing higher education landscape.

Academic Affairs Strategic Goals for 2018

Academic Quality

Learners will demonstrate professionally valued competencies through cohesive and evidence-based teaching and learning experiences.

Objective 1: Deliver learner-centered, authentic, collaborative, and data-driven academic programs.

Objective 2: Establish a prior learning assessment program available to all learners.

Objective 3: Institutionalize a continuous quality improvement process that enables ongoing, data-driven enhancement of teaching and learning.

Objective 4: Align faculty training and development with the learning model to maximize the benefit of UMUC faculty's real-world experience.

Culture

Academic Affairs will be an inclusive teaching and learning community characterized by engagement and collaboration.

Objective 1: Develop a program for celebrating the achievements and contributions of Academic Affairs faculty and staff.

Objective 2: Promote and expand opportunities for faculty and staff to contribute ideas that improve Academic Affairs.

Objective 3: Develop and utilize intentional communications channels for all Academic Affairs stakeholders.

Stewardship

Academic Affairs operations will allocate, manage, and monitor all organizational resources, prioritizing practices that achieve and reinvest in the academic mission.

Objective 1: Cultivate mutual responsibility for stewardship by developing and sharing resources and effective processes across departments and units.

Objective 2: Manage fiscal resources with attention to reinvestment and reallocation consistent with evolving priorities.

Objective 3: Create greater strategic capacity and operational agility by articulating clearly defined roles and providing necessary equipment, materials, and continuing development to ensure performance effectiveness.

(University of Maryland University College, 2018)

An analysis of L&D maturity has placed TUS at Level 2, consistent L&D events (Felber, 2018a).

Stage 0: No Formal Training	Stage 1: Ad hoc, Sporadic training	Stage 2: Consistent L&D Events	Stage 3: Institutionalized L&D	Stage 4: Enterprise Learning
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A subsequent needs analysis has identified an overall need to more closely align L&D with organizational goals in order to bring TUS to Level 3 of L&D maturity, institutionalized L&D. The analysis detailed three areas targeted for improvement: development of faculty teaching competencies, support for faculty's disciplinary L&D, and integration of existing resources for staff (Felber, 2018b). This L&D improvement plan will propose plans for each of these three areas, including management and measurement.

On overarching goal of the proposed L&D plan is to align L&D with organizational strategy, in order to support attainment of Academic Affairs' strategic goals and objectives (Impact International, 2001; Lykins, 2012; Margolis, 2012). All components of the plan will rely on online platforms, in order to support TUS's remote faculty and staff.

The Teaching Competency Development Program

Objective 4 in support of the Academic Affairs academic quality goal is to "align faculty training and development with the learning model to maximize the benefit of UMUC faculty's real-world experience" (University of Maryland University College, 2018). In order to achieve this goal, it is proposed that teaching competencies be more clearly defined and connected to faculty training and development.

The proposed plan for developing teaching competencies will include these steps:

1. Compile a list of teaching competencies that is aligned with the current learning model. As noted in Felber (2018b), because the Enhancing the Learning Model initiative in TUS "is being treated as an ongoing process of improvement, the faculty role and associated teaching competencies should be revisited on a regular basis to ensure they continue to support the current learning model" (p. 3).
2. Categorize current teaching L&D opportunities according to the teaching competencies that they address. Eliminate teaching L&D opportunities that do not align with any teaching competency required by the current learning model. Note teaching competencies that are not supported by any current L&D opportunities.

3. For each teaching competency that is not supported by any current L&D opportunities, prioritize the development of at least one new L&D opportunity. These new L&D opportunities can fall within one of the currently available types of teaching-related L&D: self-paced workshops, facilitated workshops, how-to videos, Quick Guides, and webinars (Felber, 2018a). All of these L&D opportunities will continue to be offered 100% online to serve the faculty, who are nearly all working remotely. Self-paced workshops and facilitated workshops will be conducted in the LEO learning management system. How-to videos will be posted on the UMUC YouTube account. Quick Guides will be in PDF format and will be available on the Faculty Development Engage (enterprise collaboration) space. Webinars will take place in WebEx.

Assessing Teaching Competencies

Each faculty member will be observed by a program chair or collegiate faculty member once per year. The observation form to be completed by the observer will reflect the teaching competencies identified in Item 1 of the plan above. For each competency, the faculty member will be rated 1 (entry level), 2 (intermediate), or 3 (expert). Based on these ratings, particular L&D opportunities will be recommended, with the first priority of increasing any 1 (entry level) ratings, and the second priority of increasing any 2 (intermediate) ratings.

Encouraging and Rewarding Teaching L&D

The majority of TUS faculty are adjuncts who are contracted for teaching only. Supporting adjunct faculty in their development is both important and challenging (Savage & Pollard, 2016). Incentives will help encourage and reward faculty to development their teaching competencies.

TUS adjunct faculty are currently categorized as either Adjunct I or Adjunct II. Currently faculty move from Adjunct I to Adjunct II after 35 credit hours taught at UMUC (Fray, 2016). This proposal will change the requirement for Adjunct II to require at least a 2 (intermediate) rating in each teaching competency. Adjunct II status carries a higher rate of pay as eligibility for participating in the Adjunct II Contract Pilot, which offers faculty greater stability and predictability in staffing. This system will create an incentive for adjunct faculty to participate in recommended L&D opportunities to increase their level of teaching competency.

Collegiate faculty will be expected to maintain at least a level 2 (intermediate) rating for all teaching competencies. Any competencies for which they fall below level 2 will be reflected in their quarterly Q-check reviews and should be targeted as improvement areas for the following quarter.

Evaluating the Teaching Competency Development Program

The Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2009) will be used to evaluate the Teaching Competency Development Program, particularly the workshops and webinars. The four areas to be measured in the Kirkpatrick model are reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

Reaction: Workshop and webinar participants will respond to surveys to provide their reactions to training.

Learning: Surveys will also include questions asking participants to summarize lessons learned in the training.

Behavior: Faculty Development will follow up with randomly selected workshop and webinar participants four months after their participation with an additional questionnaire to ascertain to what extent they applied their learning in their subsequent teaching.

Results: Faculty Development will track participation in workshops and webinars. Faculty observation data will be tracked in Workday and shared with Faculty Development so that improvement in teaching competencies can be compared with participation in workshops and webinars.

Support for Disciplinary L&D

Felber (2018b) has articulated the importance of UMUC supporting disciplinary L&D activities such as conference attendance, for both collegiate and adjunct faculty. Work in this area will support Academic Affairs Stewardship goal by “prioritizing practices that achieve and reinvest in the academic mission” (University of Maryland University College, 2018).

While specific decisions regarding disciplinary L&D will remain at the department level, it is proposed that a system be implemented across TUS to create a clear and uniform process for requesting and awarding funds toward disciplinary L&D. This will specifically support Objective 1 of the Stewardship goal, “Cultivate mutual responsibility for stewardship by developing and sharing resources and effective processes across departments and units” (University of Maryland University College, 2018). The proposed process is outlined below.

1. Faculty will request funds for conference attendance in Workday, UMUC’s online HR system, through a module called “My Program Learning.” Fund requests must include the event/learning opportunity for which funds are requested and the faculty member’s explanation of the benefits of participation. In addition to benefits for the faculty member’s development, this explanation will include the benefit that the faculty expects to provide to the program and/or department.
2. Program chairs will review funding requests for their value to disciplinary L&D. They will provide Level 1 Approval or Rejection.
3. Funding requests that receive Level 1 Approval will go to the department’s Vice Dean for financial review. If funds are available and approved, they will provide Level 2 Approval. The faculty member will then receive notification from Workday with information on how to proceed with their requested L&D activity.

Evaluating Value to TUS

While conference attendance and other disciplinary L&D do not lend themselves to the same type of assessment as development of teaching competencies, it is still important to ensure that L&D opportunities benefit TUS and support Academic Affairs’ strategic goals.

Faculty accepting funding for disciplinary L&D will be required to deliver benefit back to their programs and/or departments after participation. This could take many forms such as a presentation to colleagues about disciplinary trends, a new teaching technique, or a useful resource.

Each year, program chairs and the vice dean within a department will produce a joint report on the disciplinary L&D activity that has taken place that year and the benefit delivered back to the department. This report will conclude with a section on disciplinary L&D needs that are not being fulfilled and should be prioritized in the coming year.

Improved Integration of Existing Resources for Staff

Felber (2018a) notes that a number of L&D resources are available for staff through, for example, Books 24x7, SkillSoft, American Management Association, and Online Learning Consortium; however, a system is needed to make these resources more useful in working toward organizational goals (Felber, 2018b). In addition, Felber (2018b), observes “a need to encourage and support follow-up discussion of staff training and connections to real-world job scenarios” (p. 5). Spiglanin (2015) describes the importance of such connections to supplement formal/classroom training. More systematic use of staff L&D resources will support Academic Affairs’ Stewardship goal, particularly Objective 3, “Create greater strategic capacity and operational agility by articulating clearly defined roles and providing necessary equipment, materials, and continuing development to ensure performance effectiveness” (University of Maryland University College, 2018).

The proposed plan for to fill the first of these needs follows the same general architecture as the Teaching Competency Development Plan presented above.

1. Compile a list of workplace competencies for each staff role in TUS. These roles will include managers (including vice deans), directors, administrative staff, program chairs and collegiate faculty. (These last two categories are treated as both faculty and staff.)
2. Compile a list of existing L&D resources that are available to support each competency.
3. If there are any competencies for which insufficient L&D resources are available, acquire access to resources that fit the need. If any of these competencies are very common for TUS roles, perform financial analysis to determine if internal training development would be more cost effective. While in-person training may be considered, all L&D opportunities should include arrangements for remote participation via WebEx or other online platform.

Assessing Staff Competencies

Staff participate in quarterly Q-Check reviews with their supervisors. Q-Check reviews will be enhanced to include rating staff for all competencies associated with their job roles on the scale 1 (entry-level), 2 (intermediate), 3 (expert). Based on these ratings and the collections of resources developed for each competency, the supervisor can recommend appropriate L&D resources for the staff member.

Follow-up Social Learning and On-the-Job Connections

For each staff competency, an Engage discussion space will be established and managed by a representative of Human Resources. After participating in an L&D activity targeted to a particular competency, staff will be encouraged to visit the Engage space and join the discussion. There, staff can discuss any new insights they have developed and questions that have arisen related to the competency or the L&D activity. They can also discuss workplace challenges they are facing and opportunities for applying their learning to those challenges.

Evaluating Development of Staff Competencies

Again, the Kirkpatrick Model will be used. However, because many L&D resources are brief and housed on non-UMUC platforms, it will be most practical to conduct evaluation as part of the quarterly Q-Check process.

Reaction: When preparing for Q-Check meetings, staff will be asked for their reactions to the L&D activities they participated in during the previous quarter.

Learning: Staff will summarize their learning from L&D activities, also while preparing for Q-Check meetings.

Behavior: As part of the Q-Check process, supervisors will evaluate staff improvement in demonstrating competencies on the job.

Results: Supervisors will evaluate how department/program functioning changes as staff participate in L&D activities.

Conclusion

This proposal recognizes that TUS faculty and staff have a great many L&D opportunities available to them and lays out a plan for making best use of these opportunities to develop employee competencies that support Academic Affairs' strategic goals. Given the remote nature of most of the faculty and some of the staff, all L&D activities will be available through distance learning platforms.

There are three areas of focus. First, the Teaching Competency Development Program will align faculty development opportunities with teaching competencies that support the learning model. Program chairs and/or collegiate faculty will assess faculty teaching competencies and recommend appropriate L&D to raise the level of competency. Second, funding for faculty's disciplinary L&D will be managed through a Workday module called "My Program Learning." Disciplinary L&D and the knowledge returned to the programs and departments will be tracked and evaluated. Finally, existing L&D resources for staff will be aligned with staff competencies. The quarterly Q-Check performance review process will be used as an opportunity for staff to provide feedback on their L&D experience and for supervisors to assess competencies and recommend further L&D.

It is expected that implementing this proposal will bring TUS to Stage 3 of L&D maturity, which represents institutionalized L&D. At that point, a new needs analysis can be conducted for bringing TUS to Stage 4, enterprise learning.

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