

Department of Youth Development

Professional Time Scheduling Report

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The Department of Youth Development identified the need to review the required skills and level of understanding of Professional Time Scheduling as a tool for achieving life-work balance for unclassified staff. Questions were raised at an October 2010 Department of Youth Development Meeting by membership regarding the Professional Time Scheduling Document developed by colleagues within UW Extension, Cooperative Extension. Several department members were unaware of the documents existence and those who were aware of the document did not recall the content within it.

During our April 5, 2011 Department of Youth Development Meeting an overview of the document entitled *Professional Time Scheduling for Unclassified Staff* was provided by Interim Program Director, Donna Menart. Menart indicated that this document was created in 2004 and had been revised several times to provide the best information to unclassified staff regarding their responsibilities to clientele and colleagues and their right to personal time away from work. Menart reviewed the background, definition and assumptions related to Professional Time Scheduling. In addition, she reviewed the operational guidelines as established within local levels of Cooperative Extension.

Also during the April 5th meeting, thirty-seven department members were surveyed regarding the skills and level of understanding of Professional Time Scheduling. The slides focused the discussion among department members. Members were asked to select whether they strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree or strongly agree with several statements. These statements ranged in topics from personal comfort with Professional Time Scheduling to impressions of others use or ability to use Professional Time Scheduling. A follow-up electronic survey was distributed through Youth-Line in October 2011 where questions focused on abilities, boundaries, and advice for effective use of Professional Time Scheduling.

Response to early questions indicate that department members were allocating ample time to their work. Eighty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they, as unclassified staff, have work responsibilities which extend beyond normal working hours. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in scheduling professional time, they are able to meet clientele needs and position responsibilities. These responses indicate that overall client needs are being met within the current hours that staff are working.

Responses varied regarding the amount of time allocated to personal life. Among department members 44% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "In scheduling professional time, I have adequate time away from job responsibilities", 17% were neutral, and 39% agreed or strongly agreed. These responses may indicate one or more of several things. Members may truly vary in their abilities to use professional time scheduling to achieve work-life balance; they may vary in understanding their rights and responsibilities related to Professional Time Scheduling or the flexibilities within local offices may vary when utilizing Professional Time Scheduling. When asked to rank self, friends, family and work according to how much time each is given, the responses overwhelmingly showed that work is given considerable more time than any other area.

The majority of colleagues perceive that they are using good communication strategies to communicate their use of Professional Time Scheduling. Seventy-eight percent of department members agreed or strongly agreed that they clearly communicate with clients, colleagues and support staff about their official work week. Another 14% remained neutral regarding this communication.

Another statement that received feedback across the spectrum was the following: “Our local office has established operational guidelines that allow for flexibility in scheduling professional time which balances work, family, friends, and self.” Forty nine percent of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. Others, approximately 51%, agreed or strongly agreed. These responses indicate a split in the implementation or practice of policies related to flexibility in scheduling.

Finally, when asked to respond to the statement: “I am confident in my ability to utilize Professional Time Scheduling to achieve a life-work balance”, answers varied. Forty-six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Twenty one percent were neutral, and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These responses may indicate that we need some assistance or coaching when it comes to professional time scheduling.

In the follow-up survey colleagues indicated that the number one factor impacting their ability to use professional time scheduling effectively was office dynamics (26%). This included everything from the varying roles of the UW-Extension Department Head to the lack of sufficient support staff to carry out the 4-H program responsibilities. The second major factor influencing professional time scheduling, accounting for 23% of the comments, related to the workload of the 4-H Staff. Comments pertaining to paperwork, number of meetings, and expectations of UW-Extension were all considered part of the large workload within the 4-H Youth Development Program. The third major factor that was distinguished involved factors that are inherent to 4-H programming: evening meetings, time of year, weekend programs, and volunteer expectations. These involved an additional 20% of the comments.

An overwhelming number (53%) of responses indicated that scheduling in personal time, making it a priority and establishing boundaries around personal factors was key advice in successful use of professional time scheduling. Another 23% of responses suggested prioritizing work based on your educational role or resources. Other great advice included: turning off technology while away from work, restricting the number of 4-H events you attend/not attending all of them, engaging in conversations within the system about generational expectations, asking yourself if attending this meeting will matter in 100 years, not giving out personal cell phone numbers, minimizing the number of events where two UW-Extension staff are present, and taking a lunch hour.

The follow-up survey asked members of the Department of Youth Development to identify someone who you think is very good at achieving a work-life balance. The following people were identified: Denise Retzleff, John DeMontmollin, and Donna Duerst.

Throughout this past year, while exploring the issues of professional time scheduling among the members of the Department of Youth Development three major findings were revealed. The first of these was that Professional Time Scheduling can be achieved, even within the 4-H Program Area. Several responses and comments indicated that, while times seem to be changing in the UW-Extension landscape, achieving a work-life balance is still a priority for many and is achieved by some. Secondly, these results indicate that a few of the major factors of whether professional time scheduling can be used effectively or

not is out of the control of the 4-H Staff. The nature of the 4-H Program, the dynamics within an office, the state and federal requirements for program accountability and colleague expectations are all factors that are determined beyond the local scope of a program. Finally, the skill set of 4-H staff and their abilities to prioritize and communicate priorities can help to successfully utilize effective professional time scheduling. Many responses indicated a sort of “frustration with self” that exists. While this frustration may extend beyond the staff’s local control, ultimately participants indicated that they needed to improve their skills, abilities and commitment to achieving a work-life balance.