Idea Sheet

Expanding the Youth Development Knowledge Base Through Restructuring Professional Development

by

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ABSTRACT

In a time of ever dwindling budgets and the need for increased accountability, the UWEX Department of Youth Development must remain true to its academic discipline. It is increasingly difficult to build a foundation of knowledge in youth development faculty and staff as dollars for professional development become scarcer. This paper examines an idea to involve more youth development faculty in the professional development process, and to reward them for their efforts through the creation of a professional development point system.
SITUATION

The University of Wisconsin-Extension’s Department of Youth Development draws it’s educational discipline from a multi-disciplinary research and knowledge base that includes communications, educational program design, youth development, youth program management and volunteerism¹. This research and knowledge base provides a foundation to support the development of educational programs which address the needs of youth from various racial, ethnic, ability and economic groups².

Among the mandates placed on the Department of Youth Development by external authorities or entities is the requirement to ensure that scholarly work is being done³. Scholarship in UW-Extension requires that the work of the scholar is based among other things, on research or knowledge in the field⁴.

This paper offers an idea to strengthen the scholarly content of the educational programs conducted by members of the UW-Extension Department of Youth Development through a restructuring of the allocation plan for professional development dollars. The concept focuses on providing incentives for department members to design and teach professional development courses, with the goal of expanding the understanding of the broad research and knowledge base of the discipline of youth development among department members and others in the field of youth development.

¹ Department of Youth Development Handbook, UW-Extension’s Department of Youth Development updated 2002, page 1
² Ibid, page 2
³ Ivey, The Department of Youth Development Strategic Planning Report September 2002, internal UW-Extension Department of Youth Development Document, Adopted 12-11-02, page 4
⁴ UWEX Articles of Faculty Governance Appendix IB, revised September 2001, page 4
OBJECTIVES

- To increase the number of ongoing professional development offerings for staff.
- To expand the youth development knowledge base of UWEX Department of Youth Development members and others involved in youth development.
- To reward members of the Department of Youth Development for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

METHODS

Establishment of individual professional development accounts:

Currently, funding for UWEX Cooperative Extension’s program for professional development comes from three sources. These include: self-directed professional development funds which are administered through the district for county-based faculty and staff, and the program area for integrated faculty and staff; institutional and program area specific professional development funds which tend to focus on program or division wide conferences; and program specific professional development funds which are administrated by the program area and are intended to increase knowledge of specific program initiatives.\(^5\)

The author proposes that analysis of this funding be conducted to determine the potential pool of professional development dollars available. From that pool each faculty and academic staff position would receive an equal allocation of professional development funds in the form of professional development points. These points would be used by the faculty or academic staff member to purchase professional development

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\(^5\) UWEX Cooperative Extension Website, February 2003, [http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/profdev.cfm](http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/profdev.cfm)
opportunities within the Department of Youth Development or the 4-H Youth Development Program area. The points would also be used to support the attainment of professional development from outside sources, and if desired, to support programming efforts through purchase of materials, equipment and/or staffing. A small portion of the pool would be retained to encourage the creation of professional development courses as discussed later.

Identification of Needed Professional Development Offerings:

A committee representing the Department of Youth Development, the 4-H Youth Development Program Area and the Wisconsin Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals would work together to develop a process aimed at identifying needed professional development opportunities in the field of 4-H and Youth Development. The committee would build on the work of the program area’s professional development advisory committee and others to prioritize professional development needs and determine which professional development needs are not currently being met. This committee could develop a survey tool to assess the youth development knowledge of faculty and staff. That same tool could be used after the points system has been operating to help measure whether the youth development knowledge base has been expanded.

Development of Ongoing Professional Development Courses:

The author proposes that members of the Department of Youth Development be encouraged to submit proposals for designing and teaching courses designed to fill gaps in current professional development offerings. These proposals would be reviewed by a committee established by the Department of Youth Development, the 4-H Youth Development Program Area and the Wisconsin Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
Development Program Area and the Wisconsin Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals. The committee would select proposals to move to the course development stage. Because cost of course development and instruction would need to be a consideration, it is realistic to expect that courses involving limited travel would be the most desirable.

The educator or educator team, whose proposal is accepted, would be allocated additional professional development points once course development is completed. When the course is taught, the instructor(s) would earn professional development points from each student taking the course. If the course is applicable to 4-H Youth Development Educators in other states or others interested or involved in the field of youth development, the course could be offered to them on a fee basis. Proceeds from these students would be shared between the instructor(s) (in the form of points), the program area and the department. Tracking the number of points acquired and spent by faculty and staff would provide a measure of the extent to which faculty and staff are being rewarded for their knowledge.

The number of ongoing professional development offerings available to youth development faculty and staff after each year of the point system’s implementation would need to be compared with the number of ongoing professional development offerings currently available. That comparison could be used as a measure to document whether the number of ongoing professional development offerings is increasing.

**Use of Professional Development Points:**

Probationary faculty and academic staff would need to submit a professional development plan to their district liaison or other comparable individuals for approval.
Faculty and academic staff in the first few years of employment would have a greater percentage of their professional development points dictated by the need to obtain foundation knowledge. Tenured faculty would have more freedom in how they choose to use their points.

Ideally, these points would be used to purchase professional development both within UW-Extension and outside of the campus. The faculty member would also be allowed to use these points for supporting programming through the purchase of materials, student interns, equipment, etc.

RESULTS/EVIDENCE

Methods for determining the success of this idea if implemented would need to be tied to the objectives outlined earlier and to any additional objectives added during the implementation stage. In the long term, the question to be answered would be, “to what extent, if any, is the knowledge base of the UWEX Department of Youth Development enhanced through the implementation of this idea”?

IMPLICATIONS

- UWEX Youth Development faculty and academic staff are faced with increasing challenges which require them to do more and more with less support. Over the last decade, we have seen county-based faculty need to become proficient in child protection issues, liability issues, child labor issues and human subjects protection issues. Counties are being asked to handle responsibilities formerly in the domain of state staff. Faculty and staff are asked to serve on a variety of teams and work
groups without compensation. This skeleton of a proposal could provide the opportunity to stem this tide by actually rewarding educators for enhancing the knowledge base of youth development.

- This proposal deals with reallocation of resource control. Reallocation of resources in any organization is met with resistance.

- Providing faculty and staff with incentives in the form of professional development points for their work in designing and teaching professional development offerings sets a precedent. Faculty and staff might attempt to limit their involvement in other professional responsibilities, in order to focus on obtaining professional development points. Careful consideration of this issue is needed if the idea proposed in this paper were to be implemented.

- Providing incentives, as this idea suggests, could enhance morale and strengthen the commitment of faculty to the principles of youth development.

- This proposal does not fully explore the impact on involving internal and external partners in program development. A system to ensure that UWEX Youth Development can continue to explore partnerships would need to be created prior to the implementation of the idea offered in this paper.

- Faculty and staff who have “hit a wall” could be reenergized by this proposal as their knowledge base could be shared with a whole new audience, their colleagues.

- The idea offered in this paper is a discussion starting point. More input, discussion and refinement is needed to move the idea into the implementation phase.