Student Affairs Professional Development Task Force
Report and Recommendations

Introduction
As the committee engaged in discussions of the recommended agenda items, we continually focused around the three topics of Engagement, Leadership and Management. We found that these were the most appropriate ways to address the needs of all staff via professional development. When looking into organization competencies, these were also areas that seemed to reflect across the various entities.

As the committee discussed these three areas, we agreed upon the following broad definitions that would apply to both Merit and P & S staff and utilized these definitions when creating the survey referenced below.

Engagement – active participation
Leadership – demonstrating initiative
Management – day-to-day operations

Assessment of Student Affairs Staff Relative to Professional Development (PD)
An assessment was created and sent out to Student Affairs staff via Survey Monkey. With 90 respondents, a few general conclusions that can be drawn include:

- The two top professional goals of the respondents include: improve professional skills (34.4%) and find more satisfaction and opportunity in current position (21.1%)
- The three PD opportunities respondents have participated in include campus training sessions (83.3%), departmental training sessions (71.1%) and webinars (58.9%)
- 51.1% of respondents indicated that PD was expected by their supervisor, while 22.2% were unsure whether or not it was an expectation
- 73.3% of respondents indicated that PD was encouraged or strongly encouraged by their supervisor
- When focusing on the topic of Engagement, respondents were interested in Timely Topics (56.7%) and Area Specific Training (55.6%)
- For the topic of Leadership, respondents almost equally responded with interest on Motivating Team (51.1%), Timely Topics (50.0%), Conflict Resolution (48.9%) and Empowering Students (46.7%)
- The topic of Management had almost equal responses in the area of Conflict Resolution (52.2%), Team Building (48.9%) and Staffing Issues (46.7%)
- Additional PD opportunities included: PD fund for each department, professional organization membership for individuals to access, departmental collaboration and specific sessions for Merit staff

The complete results of the survey are attached to this report.

One distinctive conclusion that can be drawn from this survey is a desire by staff to engage in professional development. In addition, the topics of conflict resolution and timely topics were noted in two of the three focus areas (as well as in discussions we engaged in as a committee).

Finally, as a committee, we felt that it was not so much that P&S staff and merit staff have different needs to focus on as much as new professionals vs. seasoned professionals. We felt that new professionals need more information as to how to gain knowledge and develop competencies in their current role and seasoned professionals need more of a focus on staying motivated and “fresh” in their position. These could be the same for merit staff within the realm of new vs. seasoned. Finally, we felt that no matter
what your level of experience, it is extremely important to stay updated on best practices within the departmental area.

Best Practices and Cost Effectiveness
After exploring the various professional organizations within our designated areas, as well as a web-based review of comparable institutions, the committee determined the following best practices:

- **Division Wide Professional Development Committee** – creating a designated group of staff members to focus on determining access to and creation of professional development topics.
- **Conference Attendance** – as expected, this is an important opportunity given to staff. However, adding the component of “conference sharing” and providing relevant information, a presentation or true evidence of program development have been discussed as necessary with regards to conference attendance.
- **Speakers** – inviting speakers to campus that will engage staff in a relevant topic.
- **Webinars** – these are readily available across all disciplines and very cost effective. Topics are often relevant across disciplines, which can lead to opportunities to share.
- **Book Club** – whether reading current events in articles or a book that is found to be relevant, this appears to be a common means of continued professional development. However, focusing on the relevancy of the discussion to position/program/responsibilities at UNI is an extremely important component.
- **“Lunch & Learn”** – providing opportunities for learn about the other departments within Student Affairs is extremely important. As departments (and staff) change, knowledge of other areas can prove to be very valuable as we hope to serve as resources for students.
- **Round Table Discussions** – similar to the Lunch & Learn concept, determining relevant topics and bring staff together to have a focused discussion on those topics enabling staff to share across disciplines.

With the exception of conference attendance, we believe that all other items designated above could be considered cost effective. More importantly is to be able to recognize and utilize the resources that we have available on campus. *Please see attached information from peer institutions.*

Research opportunities offered by NASPA and ISPA

**ISPA**
Opportunities would include *conference attendance and committee opportunities*. The ISPA website provides little to no information about options for professional development and we were unable to gain any significant information about opportunities for staff.

**NASPA**
Opportunities include regional and national *conference involvement and attendance*. Members receive access to *presentation archives*, which is archived material from various conferences, institutes, workshops and other professional development events. Members can also access information and resources in a specific subject matter that pertains to student affairs through *knowledge communities*. Finally, members have access to *NASPA publications* ranging in content from scholarly research to current “hot topics” in student affairs.
Recommendations

Focus professional development on the following identified areas:

**Engagement**  (diversity, community awareness, area specific training, social media, timely topics)

**Leadership**  (motivate team, conflict resolution, empower students, regional expert, timely topics)

**Management**  (budgeting, staffing issues, conflict resolution, team building, localized knowledge, timely topics)

Create a **sustainable professional development committee** with representation from departments throughout Student Affairs. The goal would be to have a committee that continues from year to year and develops a good “history” as to provide continuity to the committee.

Develop **three division wide professional developments per semester** staff can attend. One with a focus area of *new professional staff*, one with a focus area of *merit staff* and one with a focus area of “*seasoned*” *professional staff*. Topic could be the same, but presenters and approach may be different because of the audience.

**Participate in webinar opportunities** through the various organizations and share those opportunities with all Student Affairs staff, when feasible.

Create a “**Conference Scholarship**” through the Vice President’s Office for staff to attend national, often more expensive, conferences. One expectation of recipients of this scholarship would be that they present information within their department as well as at a Lunch and Learn program.

Create a monthly “**Lunch and Learn**” **program** with a limited number of participants that could be a round table format, resource sharing from various departments or an article discussion.

Have a **book club**, two times per semester, that is facilitated by a Dean or Director. With a limited number of participants, books/articles could be provided at no cost.

Encourage discussions of **current issues** within individual departments and share those resources throughout the division.

Create a **professional development library** with books and journals from student affairs and departmental focus areas.

**Create a strong emphasis of professional development** throughout the division, so that supervisors are encouraging and/or requiring this from their staff members.

Create **mentoring program** so that new professionals and graduate students could have a connection as they learn about their department and institution and becoming a professional.

When appropriate, share an organization’s **institutional membership** information so that staff members are able to access on-line “members only” resources.

Ensure that staff members are aware, and given permission to **participate in sessions/workshops** offered by Human Resources, Multicultural Center, School of Business, the Chamber and other entities.