


The background is a solid bright yellow. Scattered across the entire surface are numerous orange pencils. Some pencils are sharpened to a point, while others have their erasers visible. They are oriented in various directions, creating a dynamic, textured background.

Sharpening

Skills

***(Without Breaking
the Bank)***



Professional development opportunities prove to be wise investments for staff, their institutions, and the field of international education.

BY KAREN DOSS BOWMAN

When Trevor Foley was tapped for the position of global alumni ambassador and director of international outreach for the Purdue Alumni Association 2 years ago, he already had a broad range of professional experiences in international education—primarily in international student services. Still, knowing that his new position would require building strong partnerships across the Purdue University campus with colleagues in areas such as international admissions and study abroad, Foley sought an intensive professional development opportunity: enrollment in NAFSA's Academy for International Education.

Because the yearlong program comes with significant time and financial commitments, Foley realized it could be a stretch for his department's budget. So, when he outlined his case to his supervisors for enrolling in the Academy, Foley offered to assist with travel costs.

"I knew the experience would be valuable to my new position and would allow me to gain exposure to the larger international education field," Foley says. "I made the case that participating in the Academy would provide the opportunity to get more experience in different areas within international education, to expand connections with campus partners in international education, and to explore new ways of working with them. The timing seemed right, and I wanted to do what I could to make it happen."

Such professional development experiences nurture overall competency in the field of international education by sharpening practitioners' skills and keeping them up to date on the industry's best practices. Perhaps most important, participating in these types of learning opportunities allows international education professionals at every stage in their career to engage with and learn from each other.

Even when finances are tight, finding creative ways to invest in the staff's professional learning and growth can translate into more robust services and academic experiences for students—and ultimately develop a loyal alumni base that can be critical in the recruitment of future students.

A Learning Environment for Educators

Colleges and universities are in the business of learning—promoting innovation and the exchange of ideas across disciplines—but often this mission is focused solely on the students. Studies show that many faculty and staff feel unsupported in the area of professional growth.



In a January 2018 article for Gallup, Brandon Busteed—now president for university partnerships at Kaplan Inc.—cites research indicating that “college and university employees rank right around the bottom-quartile on ‘learn and grow’ measures compared with other employees in the U.S.” Busteed reports that, according to Gallup surveys, just four in 10 higher education employees “strongly agree” that their organization had offered them opportunities to “learn and grow” during the previous year—that’s compared to seven in 10 workers from other industries who

felt they received learning and growth opportunities.

Research shows that creating a culture of learning and development may have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and retention. A study by Academic Impressions found that 88 percent of higher education workers value professional growth, and 71 percent say these opportunities would make them more likely to stay at their institution for the long term.

Supporting this idea, research from the Association of Talent Development (ATD) indicates that “organizations

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—KRISTEN FYFE-MILLS

with a strong culture of learning—with an intentional plan for talent development that is well supported and funded—consistently outperform their competition,” says Kristen Fyfe-Mills, ATD’s associate director of communications.

“This is true across industries and sectors,” she says. “Professional development, if it is going to have a positive impact, must be connected to the organization’s goals and strategies. In higher ed, this means gaining support and buy-in from deans and other school officials, providing ample opportunities for both staff and faculty professional development, and identifying and/or creating available resources.”

Lauren Carlson, associate director for professional learning services at NAFSA, says that supervisors who invest in staff learning opportunities foster supportive workplace environments that energize employees to reach their potential.

“It empowers them to do new things and to feel ownership over their own career,” Carlson says. “Creating learning opportunities will help boost confidence as people increase their skills. When employees are empowered to learn, it really motivates them to bring [that training] back and use it to impact their own departments.”

A Worthwhile Investment

The benefits of professional development are clear. Why, then, aren’t more higher education employees, including international educators, taking advantage of these opportunities?

Budget and time constraints are the primary obstacles. With higher education facing a scarcity of resources—and international offices acutely feeling the pain—professional growth is often one of the first budget line items to go during spending cuts. With regard to the time commitment, low-staffed departments can rarely shut down or reduce operations for an extended period to allow all employees to attend training sessions. But Jihna Gavilanes, vice president of international admissions for International Student Admissions Service (ISAS), says international educators should not let these barriers stand in the way.

“Time is well invested in training,” Gavilanes says. “It’s just important to pick the right timing for these activities so that everyone on staff gets the most out of these experiences.”

ISAS has addressed the challenge of time limitations by scheduling training sessions for the entire staff during times when the volume of calls from prospective students is expected to be low. To provide cost-effective instruction, ISAS established its own in-house training department to develop content that cultivates intercultural and interpersonal skills, as well as critical thinking to better serve the students. To assess employees’ knowledge, ISAS often uses the free app Kahoot!, which makes training more fun and keeps everyone on track, Gavilanes says.

NAFSA Region I leadership also addressed the cost and time-crunch issues by launching its Summer

Summit in July 2018, a daylong training event that includes beginner- and intermediate-level workshops on F-1 student advising and a beginner-level workshop on J-1 advising. The low-cost event was held at a centrally located university that was easily accessible from the interstate. Between informational sessions, the 40 participants came together for lunch, giving them time for networking. The event was so successful that Region I hopes to host another one this summer.

Joshua Davis, assistant director for the Office of International Student and Scholar Services at Portland State University, who helped plan the summit, says, “The training summit is something that, as a region, we’ve done to try and make those learning opportunities more accessible to everyone by putting it at a time of year when people maybe have a bit more access to money close to that fiscal year transition.”

“The regulations don’t change drastically from year to year, but there are, from time to time, very large changes that have very far-reaching and sometimes very subtle implications,” he says. “Having that ability to interact with colleagues and be trained by colleagues who are all in the same field of employment is really critical, [and] the opportunity to build connections between people is really beneficial for the overall strength of the [international education] community.”

Jackie Li, associate director for advising at Green River College, who also helped plan the summit, adds, “In the end, we can serve our institutions and our students better by being more up to date on what’s going on [in the world of visa regulations].”

A Variety of Learning Formats

High-quality, engaging training does not have to be costly or time-consuming. Traditionally, employee development took place at professional conferences or in a classroom setting. The digital

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age has ushered in a multitude of technology-based solutions (e-Learning) and other formats to fit any budget. Today's professional development options can take many forms—from professional conferences, college courses, and on-site training to webinars, podcasts, training videos, and educational apps.

Many employees want to learn on their own terms, Carlson says. Microlearning—a format in which learners obtain shorter, condensed bursts of information that focus on a particular topic—is growing in popularity and facilitates that style of independent learning. Used to meet specific objectives, this content is delivered in a variety of media formats and across numerous platforms. Employees are often more likely to retain the information as a result of the engaging presentation.

“These days, it’s about bite-sized learning, and learning that you can do anywhere, anytime, and anyplace,” Carlson says. “We definitely see a trend of creating learning opportunities at the moment of need, particularly webinars and short, five-minute instructional videos.”

Other technology-based formats include learning management systems or other online education; training platforms or resources like ATD, Cornerstone OnDemand, LinkedIn Learning, and the Online Network of Educators; podcasts and webcasts; online resource centers; and more.

Characteristics Unique to International Education

Though “higher education reflects the trends we see across industries and sectors when it comes to talent development,” says Fyfe-Mills at ATD, a distinctive feature of professional development in higher education is the emphasis on peer-to-peer training. Practitioners teaching other practitioners, drawing on their experience and research, lends strong

credibility. Building these personal connections is a hallmark of how learning and professional development happens in international education—a field that is inherently interpersonal and intercultural.

NAFSA's Trainer Corps leverages this key characteristic through its 300 member-volunteers who develop, deliver, and maintain the NAFSA Core Education Program (CEP) curriculum

and materials. These individuals provide training at conferences, meetings, and workshops across the country for other international education professionals.

Salvatore Longarino, director of Fordham University's Office of International Services, has been part of the Trainer Corps for 20 years. Because the program emphasizes information sharing and network building in the international education community,



Why Millennials Matter

By 2025, millennials—individuals born between the early 1980s and 1996, according to Pew Research Center—will make up 75 percent of the U.S. workforce. At the same time, the number of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) retiring is expected to surge, leaving open many leadership roles in higher education. With millennials comprising the majority of the workforce, it is critical to attract the best and brightest to these positions and prepare them to be effective managers.

However, reports indicate that higher education as an employment sector is already a tough sell for many millennials who are drawn to innovative work environments. Tech-savvy millennials—who are frequently characterized as idealistic, team-oriented, and mission-driven—often view colleges and universities as hierarchical, procedural, and even territorial. One of best ways to attract promising talent is to provide a clear pathway for professional learning and growth.

The Gallup report *How Millennials Want to Work and Live* found that 87 percent of millennials value learning and growth opportunities in the workplace, compared with 69 percent of non-millennials. Millennials' perceptions of the availability and quality of professional development opportunities offered by their employers ranked as one of the top three factors affecting the likelihood that they would remain in their current jobs. Only one in four millennials reported feeling that his or her employer actively supports employees' development.

According to the report, “Millennials want managers to find ways to invest in their futures, hone their skills, and coach them to become the best workers they can be—starting today.”

As millennials continue to join the community of international educators, it is critical for managers to support their development through training, networking, and mentoring opportunities. In guiding millennials through the early stages of their careers, senior international education professionals will prepare them to be the future leaders and innovators in the field of international education.

Longarino prefers for his staff to be trained by these highly skilled colleagues.

"I have always felt that the Trainer Corps was the best place to focus my efforts on giving back to the field because everyone is so kind, and it's fulfilling work," says Longarino, who has worked in the field of international education for about 40 years.

"It's not only giving back to the association, but also passing on the baton to the next generation," he says. "When you're in your office, dealing [with] your own program, you can get into a bubble. So, Trainer Corps is not just about training other people—I learn, too. Every time I present a workshop, it enhances my knowledge and skills."

In addition to NAFSA's national and regional conferences, other programs built for the specific needs and characteristics of international educators include the Academy and the Management Development Program—a three-day management training for people with at least 3 years' experience in leadership positions. In providing a holistic view of the field and opportunities to learn from others, these programs have guided participants to succeed at their institutions, often leading to promotions or new opportunities. In a recent Academy cohort, for example, half of the participants received a promotion as they worked to complete the program.

Meaningful Training Opportunities

When creating a staff professional development program, it is important to keep in mind how people like to learn and the different needs of employees of all ages and proficiency levels. Millennial workers—digital natives who likely don't remember an era without the internet—may prefer e-Learning techniques over traditional learning formats. This group of workers will comprise about 75 percent of the workforce by 2025, so it is critical to consider their preferences as part of the mix.

Five Ways to Fund Professional Growth Opportunities

Professional development opportunities do not have to be costly to be effective. Here are five creative ways to make staff learning and growth more affordable:

BRING TRAINING TO CAMPUS

Plan a day or two of on-site workshops for staff at a time when a lower volume of calls or visits from students is expected. Invite experts from campus or the local community to host sessions on topics that will benefit the staff.

PARTNER WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Team up with other schools, local nonprofits, or state agencies to maximize the impact of training that is affordable. Find a centrally located host, and keep costs as low as possible.

EXPLORE OTHER INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Many colleges and universities offer professional development grants or scholarships for faculty and staff. While these funds may not cover the full cost of a conference or workshop, they can provide a valuable supplement to the department's contribution.

SEEK TRAVEL GRANTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Professional associations and other education-related organizations, including NAFSA and its regions, may offer limited scholarships and grants to qualified applicants.

SELF-FUND ALL OR A PORTION OF THE BILL

If the department's budget cannot cover the full cost of a conference or workshop, consider partially covering expenses out of pocket, especially if the event will significantly enhance personal and professional development. Even offsetting travel expenses with personal funds can be helpful. If the opportunity provides substantial career growth, it is a worthwhile investment.

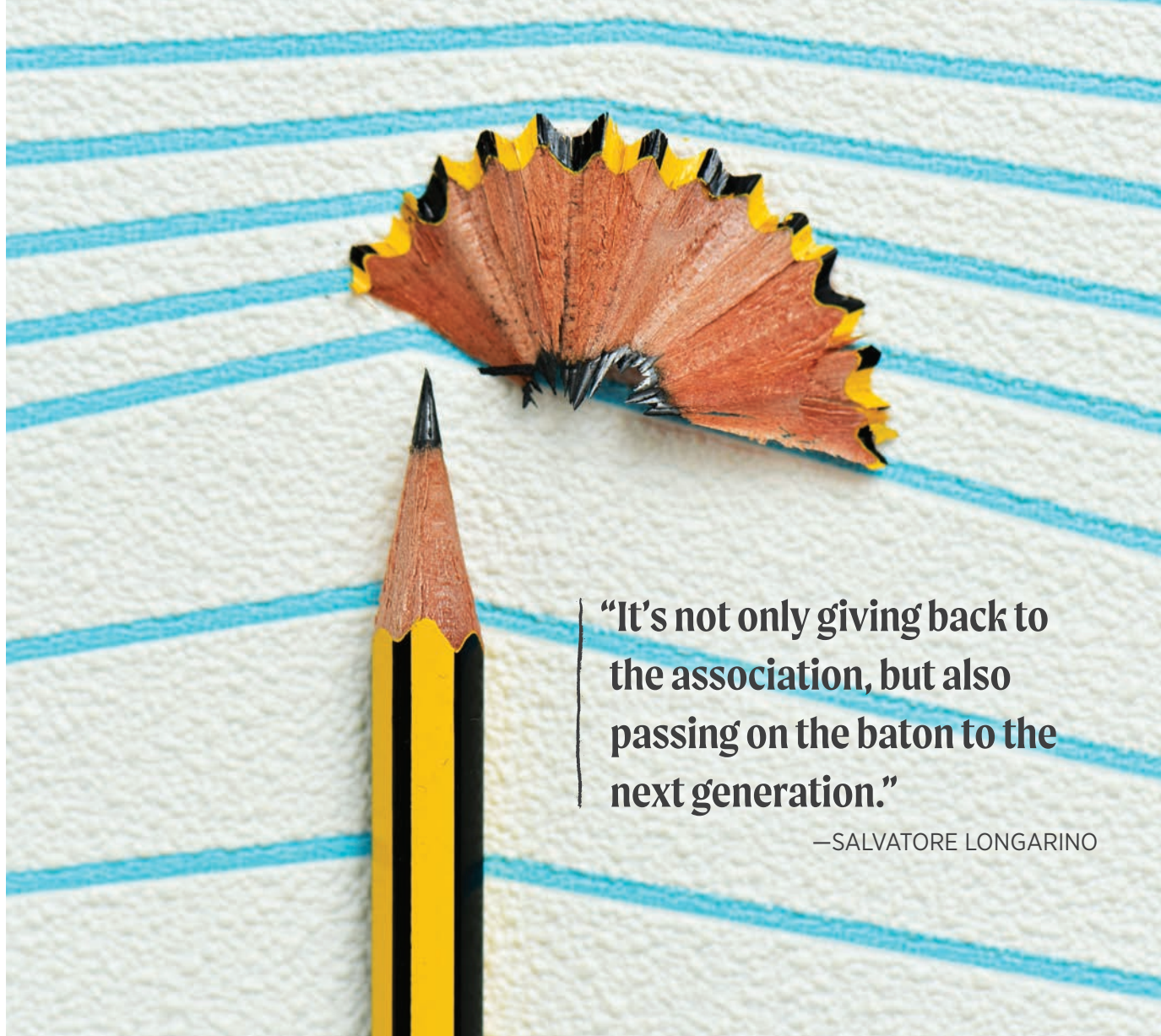
"Generational expectations aren't specific to higher education when it comes to talent development," says Fyfe-Mills. "A good program will take learner preferences into consideration, and best practice is that blended solutions—that is, a mix of in-person, virtual, reading, projects, experiential opportunities—can address most needs."

At Rhodes College—a small, private liberal arts institution with an enrollment around 2,000—undergraduate and graduate student workers handle the lion's share of the international office's daily operations to extend the reach of the two-person, full-time staff. These students are included in professional development initiatives, giving them a chance to gain professional skills on the job. Each year, Erin Hollis, associate director of international programs at Rhodes, earmarks a portion of her department's training funds to send one of the graduate assistants to Terra Dotta's annual conference to help the office stay up to date on its software.

"At Rhodes, we are concerned with the holistic development of our students," says Hollis, a past chair of NAFSA Region VII. "Hopefully, we can train our student workers in a way that will carry them through life and give them the personal and professional skills that will help them succeed and have a leg up in the world. If we just did education in the classroom, all of us, from the president to every staff member, would feel like we had failed our students."

Managers can start establishing an employee's development plan by conducting a skills assessment at onboarding to determine where there are gaps in the individual's knowledge of the field. Maintaining a library of webinars or e-Learning courses can help the employee start filling in those gaps.

"Managers should consider themselves developers of talent, though most don't," says Fyfe-Mills. "To create effective professional development plans,



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a manager is going to need to know the strengths and areas for growth for their staff, engage with staff to identify their own career aspirations, and find or create meaningful opportunities that align with staff interests and department and organization needs. Training for training’s sake is rarely a good idea.”

Following that same philosophy, Trevor Foley identified an opportunity that would not only enhance his own professional development, but also advance the goals of Purdue and its alumni association.

“I left the Academy feeling like I had a good road map of goals,” he says. “You have to direct your own professional development, and putting together a learning plan, getting feedback, and revising it—for me, that was one of the

most valuable pieces of the program. As much as possible, I integrated what I was doing [with the Academy] into my day-to-day work.”

The goal, says Fyfe-Mills, is “to create ownership of one’s learning and commitment to lifelong learning. If

people don’t own their own learning and make it a priority, no amount of forced professional development will really be impactful over the long haul.” ■

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NAFSA Resources

Careers in International Education: A Guide for New Professionals: bit.ly/IEcareers

Academy for International Education: bit.ly/2QrR86l

Management Development Program: bit.ly/2HTzzb5

Trainer Corps: bit.ly/2HyoxJm

Core Education Program (CEP) Workshops: bit.ly/2Wm1Pwm

Additional learning and training resources: bit.ly/2HyNy7q

NAFSA International Education Professional Competencies: bit.ly/2ThkyUg