

## **Creating a Vision of Professional Development at Berea College: Rationale, Definition, Goals, Activities, and Questions for Discussion**

**April, 2015**

The following is for discussion by the Staff Forum at its April 15, 2015 meeting. The intention is to begin a campus conversation about what may constitute staff development at Berea College and how it may be encouraged and supported. **This is a work in process.**

### **Rationale:**

The 2011 strategic plan, *Being and Becoming, Berea College in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* dedicates a chapter to what it means for the College to be a learning institution. It sets forth four pairs of learning goals for all members of the College community. It begins (p. 56) with the assumption that “Of course, these learning goals apply to the faculty and students engaged in the formal learning processes. But at the Berea College of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *all members* of the community, from residence hall staff and facilities management workers to administrators and secretaries, must attend to these learning goals.” The learning goals address a wide variety of topics including critical and independent thinking, the intellectual ability to enjoy a life of learning and the arts, spiritual development, service for the public good, environmental sustainability, technology (its benefits and limitations), global citizenship and the promotion of peace, and the interconnection among cultures. These learning goals are also reflected in the Workplace Expectations that guide the evaluation of all staff employees. The first of the Workplace Expectations states: *Exhibit enthusiasm for learning, striving to learn and to grow both intellectually and personally so everyone is a learner and everyone is a mentor.*

The following is a description of one possible vision for staff development (definition and goals). We want the Staff Forum to discuss this and then work to create a common understanding of what staff development should look like at the College. We have listed examples of potential professional development activities followed by questions for discussion.

First, we want to explain why a common understanding is important to the institution. We start with two of the charges given to the Berea College Staff Forum which state:

- *To strengthen the institution and its staff by recognizing, encouraging, and supporting a high level of professionalism in its workers and policies/protocols/practices.*
- *To help create a culture of civility, equity, productivity, wellness, and high morale for all who work and study at the College.*

We believe this language and the vision set forth by the 2011 strategic plan call us to provide a strong conceptual framework of what professional development is and how to strengthen it.

We also see a vital connection between professional development and the mission of the College. In fact, the last sentence of the preamble to the Great Commitments of Berea College describes the Berea experience in terms of developing a well-rounded individual who is prepared to take meaningful action. It states:

*The Berea experience nurtures intellectual, physical, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual potentials and with those the power to make meaningful commitments and translate them into action.*

Also, the sixth and seventh commitments allude to the entire community of workers and learners (*To achieve this purpose, Berea College commits itself*):

- *To create a democratic community dedicated to education and equality for women and men.*
- *To maintain a residential campus and to encourage in all members of the community a way of life characterized by plain living, pride in labor well done, zest for learning, high personal standards, and concern for the welfare of others.*

We believe that professional development at Berea College needs greater emphasis and should be deeply embedded in our culture. Therefore, we offer the following broad definition of professional development, followed by what its goals should include, and a list of potential activities that may be considered useful to our employees.

### **A Proposed Definition of Professional Development:**

*The engagement in on-going activities that help the employee grow in terms of performance, satisfaction, career status, and personal wellness recognizing that personal and professional growth and fulfillment are interrelated in such a way as to help the individual reach one's highest potential.*

We trust supervisors and their employees to know best what professional development activities are appropriate.

### **Goals of Professional Development:**

- To create a high performing community of workers engaged in life-long learning
- To promote collegiality among workers
- To enhance personal wellness and community morale
- To promote the understanding and support of the Berea College Great Commitments
- To promote the highest level of service to the institution and its community members

**Examples of Professional Development Activities** (this list is not, by any means, exhaustive. It is just to give the reader an idea of the breadth and depth of what we consider potential professional development activities depending on the needs and interests of the worker)

*Attending or actively participating in the following:*

- Workshops (local and off campus)
- Certification training
- Cross training on campus
- Conference travel
- Shadowing potential mentors or others (on and off campus)
- Making presentations, publishing papers
- Convocations
- Music, art, and lecture programs (on and off campus)
- Committee work, serving on boards, advisory groups, etc.
- Reading, study groups
- Webinars
- Christmas Country Dance School
- Appalachian Tour
- Civil Rights Tour
- Private lessons
- Others

**Possible Questions for Discussion by the Staff Forum:**

*Should professional development be encouraged for all staff employees?*

*Should professional development be an expectation of all employees?*

*How should vice presidents (and the president) communicate (regularly and coherently) to all staff employees the importance of staff development and how it will be supported?*

*How much time should employees have each week (or month) for professional development activities?*

*How could employees be allowed time to explore learning experiences both on and away from campus (including experiences that cost money and/or those that simply involve time)?*

*What concerns are there related to staff development?*