University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas
Staff Forum / Reports from Strategic Initiatives and Organizational Structure Committees
Wednesday, September 21, 2011

Jeff Banks facilitated the continued discussion of the three reports from the committees, one from the Strategic Initiatives Committee and one from each of the two subgroups of the Organizational Structure Committee.

Organizational Structure Committee

Two subcommittee reports were presented: the first is a molecular model from Subgroup 1; the second is a functional model from Subgroup 2.

Subgroup 1: Molecular Model

**Discussion from September 12:** This appears to be a definition of what we currently do, using different words to describe our functions, which may be an impetus to motivate a reviewing of our practices. We need to realize that there are no independent units or departments of the library; communication is the key to everything we do. The Operational managers, who manage day-to-day operations, will be part of the communications clearinghouse, not just department heads.

**Discussion from September 21:** Model is functional in nature. The red hexagon represents operational planning communication clearinghouse. Project managers from different areas would meet to discuss projects before reporting to the administration. The clearinghouse should contain representatives from each of the functional categories. May be more than six; not limited to the pods but draw from the functions areas. The clearinghouse would work initially to vet a project, but further subgroups may work on specific projects. Do not make assumptions about which areas should be represented in the clearinghouse. The larger group should meet to determine how each department is impacted. Keep the focus on the bigger projects. Make sure this would be a productive working group rather than another committee for the sake of a committee. There were differing opinions on whether the group should meet regularly, or if it should be as a project demands. The clearinghouse will be made up of supervisor level managers rather than department heads. If the committee is too large, it will be ineffective or guided by a few forceful personalities.

The model will not work unless decisions are forced down to working groups.

The library forum would have been useful to obtain feedback from staff about large projects such as the shifting. Groups did not know about work that needed to be done in their departments to accommodate the shift until it was a drop everything emergency.

University Relations has adopted an e-mail digest of communication partners with updates on projects, events, and news happening in their area which is sent out each week. We might adopt a similar update so that everyone can see what is going on in other departments, a formalized avenue of communication for middle level managers, which does not currently occur in the library. An e-mail digest could be one possible tool in the attempt to open up communication, one that is still protective of time and responsibilities (as opposed to meetings, which require a
dedicated time and place). We could create a discussion list for middle management or team and operational leaders. There was a disagreement whether creating such a list would make more division, with some advocating using the existing library listserv and drawing everyone into the conversation. The use of regular reports and updates rather than an open listserv to be used as needed allows not only an avenue for communication but also builds awareness of others’ departments and responsibilities. There is currently a lack of awareness of others’ job duties.

This may be distracting or take away from the specific job duties assigned to an individual. Currently, meetings are viewed as a waste of time. Conversely, the idealized view of the clearinghouse would be to encourage individuals to look outward beyond their departments, to encourage innovation and forward thinking. People working across departments get projects initiated and take advantage of opportunities. The individual members should take responsibility for making the group meetings productive and guide content.

The center of the model indicates the focus on outreach and assessment.

The model attempts to eliminate overlap between groups in specific repeated functions, which would be located in one central area. Certain skills translate into different departments, which could be streamlined by locating all instances of that function in one department, for example, creating Card Ex cards.

The Communications Clearinghouse would vet projects.

Subgroup 2: Functional Model

**Discussion from September 12:** There is no clearinghouse communication for the second group. Team leaders will rotate out. Staff job duties and responsibilities are limited by classification guidelines. We should assign jobs that will not harm an employee but will provide room for growth and opportunities.

We should evaluate job duties to be fiscally impactful.

**Discussion from September 21:** The model is a graphic representation of how we currently overlap in job duties. It resembles the current organizational structure, with the Public Services Department split into two major function categories.

The biggest issue is communication; make communication flow overlapping.

A change of structure would allow new and innovative opportunities and would be more nimble. A thorough analysis of current workflows is essential to discover overlaps and efficiencies, as is indicated in the text of the report (longer version).

Each service area should evaluate workflows then pass recommendations on to the larger group. Is a workflow audit important enough to devote resources to it? Time must be allocated away from specific duties as outlined in job description. In order to get compliance, must be mandated from the top down.
Does the organization need to change? Do we need an entire system overhaul to correct a small problem (communication)?

First subgroup model appears more democratic. Would the administration like the issue of middle managers taking power from them? There is no incentive for administration to give up authority to middle management as depicted in Subgroup 1 model. First model wouldn’t be possible without a shift in organizational culture. Subgroup 1 allows the appearance of democratic organization but still is overruled by the administration. The idea behind the cultural shift is the desired increase in communication.

It is not realistic to expect two people at the top to make all of the final decisions. Decisions are made; the lower levels determine how to complete the tasks. This is not empowerment but delegation of authority.

Currently there is no program to help middle managers develop their careers. Subgroup 1 provides more opportunity for middle managers. Subgroup 1 emphasis on decision making and project development may help middle managers to advance their opportunities to advance skills.

Most meetings produce no results. They are an exercise in futility. Typically members receive no feedback from meetings or a report of results.

Summary of points the staff attendees would like to see as outcomes of this process: More feedback. More identifying efficient ways to deal with problems. Sometimes we are too caught up in the process rather than figuring out the logistics of problem solving.

Neither model addresses the major problems in the organization, but gives opportunities for future innovation and new programs. The goal is to be nimble enough to perform task sharing and cooperation between units and departments.

We really do need a preservation department.