Self-Directed Learning and Cross-Functional Training

Jennifer Koerber, Alma Training Manager
Harvard Library Learns!, "Ways to Learn on the Job" panel

Why:

First, training isn't just skill-building, especially when it comes to cross-functional training. It's as much about learning entirely new concepts and methods that might spark new ideas in your own work. Once you have those ideas, then you can go out and build the skills to implement those ideas.

Second, learning more about what's going on in other parts of Harvard or the library field can give you **new tools for the work you're already doing**. If you're in RTL, learning about digital resources or maps or special collections can help you direct faculty and students to those resources. For Acquisitions and Resource Management folks, learning how other units use the materials you purchase and process might give you insight on how to better serve their needs. One way to improve your lateral thinking – aka, "thinking outside the box" – is by taking learning opportunities in related areas and hearing other perspectives. Use this knowledge to improve your own work and answer questions in new ways.

Third, any learning you engage in keeps the love of learning alive and provides other inputs to spark creativity in everything you do. Doing your work well is satisfying, deeply satisfying; learning new things is invigorating and can bring you new places to find that satisfaction.

What:

- Things that are directly related to your work.current or upcoming projects.
    - Indirectly includes **cross-functional training** = training in other areas of Harvard or library work that have an impact on or affected by your work. Alma training strongly encouraged cross-functional training because the system is very interconnected.
- Things that are indirectly related to your work.current or upcoming projects.
- Things that look ahead to job.next / curating your career
- General knowledge directly or indirectly related to your field
- "For fun" = purely personal interest, unrelated to work

When:

Definitely on work time: the things that are directly/indirectly related to current or upcoming needs

Possibly on work time: general knowledge directly/indirectly related to your field; Harvard-offered "fun" stuff

Probably on your own time: things that look ahead to job/next and most "for fun" stuff.

To the managers out there: I'd like to point out that by encouraging and supporting your staff in pursuing even the fun stuff or things for their next job, you increase the motivation and engagement of staff in their current work. Doing *nothing* but skill-building is BORING for many people – give them opportunities to pursue what excites them and you'll have excited staff. Double-win!

Also, **cross-training should be on work time**. As a manager just said to me yesterday: "People were making mistakes [in Alma] because they had just learned one specific function or sequence, and had forgotten (or never understood) the whole picture of how the system works. They didn't *see* the issues because they just did their one thing and didn't have the larger picture in mind or notice something strange in a different field. *They didn't know what they didn't know*, because *learning the system is more than just learning the steps* in the process." Cross-training helps staff make those larger connections – to how their work has an effect on and is affected by processes in other parts of the system – and increases the possibility they'll catch those mistakes.

Where/How:

Harvard Library Stuff! So many opportunities come across HL Comms every day, many cleverly disguised as something else:

- **Discussion group and working group open meetings**, especially if they're reporting back on a project or conference, can give you vocabulary and insights into what other groups at Harvard Libraries are up to
- **Candidate and student presentations** are showcasing people who have been asked to think hard about a topic and present on what they've thought about.
- **Book discussions (especially Baker and Law), Harvard Film Archive discussions, Houghton events, Cabot events, Preservation open houses** are all opportunities to learn more about other units and are also examples of how to put on those kinds of events (in case your unit wants to start a similar program)
- **Actual workshops and webinars** – such as the NISO individual webinars or 8-week project management course, or the increasing number of Library Learning Initiative offerings

Here's a list of topics that have come across HLComms just in the past few weeks:

- NISO webinars on digital annotation, reference work, "library as publisher," tech trends, analytics, funding, access/authority control and more
- Digital Scholarship Discussion Group: update on the Long 19th Amendment Project
- Head of Teaching & Learning candidate presentations on how the approach to teaching and learning in special collections and archives evolved over the past decade/what do the next years hold?
- Books@Baker reading and discussion of *The Fearless Organization* by Amy Edmondson
- The Social Justice Discussion Group presents *Beyond the Wall*, on life after incarceration
- A town hall on collective collections from the Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation
- Improving Digital Archive Research from the Digital Futures Consortium
- ArchivesSpace and Hollis for Archival Discovery community meeting and update
- Houghton letterpress printing workshops
- HUIT Software Engineering Working Group discussion series, which in the past has given a 101 information session on the Digital Repository Service (DRS)
- Preservation Services Open House at the Weisman Preservation Center

Stay up on it at: https://staff.library.harvard.edu/staff-events

In-person training! The folks from CWD talked about this, so I'll just give a shout out to all the on-campus and local opportunities for learning. This, of course, also includes any skill-building in tools you need for your work, like Alma or Connexion, but it also includes courses through the Extension school or in-person training available from professional organizations.

Online training! The proliferation of online options is incredible, and it's as easy as tuning in from your desk. Some are synchronous ("live") but many others are asynchronous and available as you have time to watch them. Harvard has a subscription to Lynda.com and many courses are available via the Harvard Training Portal, but there's much more:

Library related:

- WebJunction from OCLC
- Infopeople
- Library Juice (a newer entry in the field)
- Library Journal webinars and series
- National or international conferences and organizations offer online training, (e.g. ALA, ACRL)

General or tech-related:

- Gale Courses – available via the Boston Public Library (which you all qualify for an eCard to)
- Floqq – like Lynda.com, and includes Spanish- and Portuguese-language learning
- edX, of course, with HarvardX and MITx courses
- MindTools.com has "soft skills" learning, including time management and public speaking