

Research Briefs

KEY FINDINGS

- The overall format and structure of the training sessions were effective
- Instructor demonstrated expertise and a concern for participant learning
- Reviews and/or assessment conducted during and after the sessions is needed
- Departmental customized issue-focused trainings are needed

IMPLICATIONS

For practice:

- Continue using computer labs with large front screen
- Dedicate time for content reviews, assessing learning and hands-on practice

For Policy:

- Continue to provide trainings on a regular basis for faculty and staff
- Consider conducting departmental level trainings

Research:

- Survey STC faculty and staff to gauge their technological training needs
- Continue conducting focus groups in order to regularly gauge participant perceptions of the effectiveness of trainings

Client Services: A Qualitative Inquiry of IT Training Sessions

South Texas College's (STC) Information Services and Planning Division (IS&P) has assigned the task of ensuring that the technological learning needs of faculty and staff are met by having the Client Services Department offer various training courses throughout the year. This analysis is a qualitative inquiry into clients' perceptions of such trainings. Results from a focus group discussion showed that participants were satisfied with the overall format of the trainings sessions, the material that was covered, and the teaching style of the instructor. However, participants also felt that due to the large amounts of information covered in sessions it was difficult to retain everything covered. Participants provided many suggestions for improvements such as dedicating more time for questions, providing reviews, conducting assessment of learning, and offering customized trainings specific to departmental or individual needs.

Background

The importance of keeping postsecondary faculty and staff up to date with IT training has been well documented by scholars. Some scholars have also emphasized that faculty and staff may feel pressured to acquire the skills necessary to remain knowledgeable of new technology. The mission statement of the Client Services Department emphasizes the effectiveness of such training. Technology trainings are offered by this department to any interested STC faculty or staff through group training sessions that are conducted throughout the year.

Purpose of Study

This study was conducted to gain insight into participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the trainings provided by Client Services. Results from this study will be used to improve the training and to better suit the needs of STC clients.

Methodology

Nine participants for this study were randomly selected to participate in a focus group from a list of all participants who at-

tended at least one training session during the Spring 2010 semester. As an incentive, all participants received a ten-dollar voucher good for a meal at the STC cafeteria. During the focus group, participants were asked specific questions regarding their expectations, likes, dislikes and general experiences with the training sessions. Follow-up questions were asked when appropriate and suggestions for future training sessions were also elicited.

An audio recording of the focus group was transcribed and inputted into NVivo 8 software for analysis. Researchers coded the transcription in order to identify main themes expressed during the course of the focus group.

Findings

Overall, all participants were pleased with the training sessions, the material covered, and the materials that were distributed during the course of their training sessions (hand-outs). Participants were also satisfied with the set-up of the class; they felt that having the trainer demonstrate class material on a large screen located in front of the class made it easy for

them to follow along on their individual computers.

Trainer

"In my experience and what I heard from my staff was that...the trainer was very knowledgeable."

Participants were most pleased with the instructional style and demeanor of the trainer. As one participant pointed out, "in my experience and what I heard from my staff was that first of all, the trainer was very knowledgeable." They also felt that the trainer was amicable, patient and provided encouragement to all trainees. Participants also stated that they would like to see more trainers that could be assigned to specific departments to carry out specific types of trainings tailored specifically to departmental needs.

Information

All participants agreed that the breadth of the material covered during the sessions was interesting, but perhaps too much to grasp or retain at one time. Some participants felt that due to the large amount of infor-



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mation covered, sessions felt too “rushed” and “fast-paced”. The handouts would at least provide a reference to look back on at a later time.

Participants provided several other suggestions that could be incorporated to facilitate the learning and retention of the material i.e., breaking up the content into shorter sessions, providing reviews either at the end or throughout the session, providing more hands-on practice, dedicating more time for “Q&A”, conducting assessment of the learning with short quizzes, and using Classroom Performance Clickers to assess learning during the courses.

“When you are going that fast, you just kind of want to keep going and then you forget what you were going to ask.”

Level of Material

Some participants felt that the level of the material presented was not aligned with their capability. One participant suggested creating an introductory course that would give basic background information on the various software programs for beginners. Still others felt the opposite, “I already knew how to go through the programs so I felt like I was just sitting there...”

Ideas for future trainings

Participants also gave many suggestions on future trainings. All participants largely agreed that they would like to see trainings that are more specific and customized to certain issues that either individuals or departments need help with. One example that was



discussed at length by all participants was help using and managing various aspects of Excel databases such as exporting data from Argos/Banner, creating address labels directly from excel databases and mail merging from excel databases. One participant suggested that such trainings could be offered in a sequential successive type of format where in the first session a database is created and then one could use the that same dataset to create a mail merge and so on. Participants felt that if such trainings were offered, individuals would be more enthusiastic and motivated to attend such sessions. This would also increase the retention of information presented. Other types of training that were mentioned were Photoshop, HTML, Publisher and social media (e.g. Twitter & Facebook).

All participants agreed that due to the increased time flexibility that summers offer, this is when they would most likely be able to attend such training sessions.

Recommendations

Since participants were satisfied with the overall set-up and format of the training sessions, it is recommended that Client Services keep this set-up for future sessions. The patient and encouraging teaching style of the trainer is also something

that should be kept consistent since most participants emphasized this as being beneficial.

In order to address matching the expertise level of the training to the individuals’ capability, it is suggested that Client Services develop an assessment test or quiz that participants take before they sign up for training sessions in order to gauge their level of prior knowledge of the subject. Training sessions could then be designed at different levels in order to meet client needs.

In addition to conducting general training sessions, Client Services may also consider conducting specific issue-focused trainings. Summer months seem to be a good time to offer trainings, especially for faculty and staff who have relatively flexible schedules.

The curriculum for the training sessions should be reviewed to see where it might be reduced or moved into new sessions as a series on a particular topic. This would allow opportunity for more hands-on practices, assessments, reviews, and “Q&A”.

It is apparent that the Client Services Department at STC is providing an invaluable service to the college in technology training. The implementation of participant feedback would further improve training sessions.

“I loved my training class I took...and I had great trainers which mainly got me involved in the class.”

Implications for Future Research

Client services should work with Research and Analytical Services to survey departments to determine training needs. Follow-up inquiries should also continue in order to regularly gauge participant satisfaction with the training sessions.