Onboarding
College of Arts and Letters Onboarding Report

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The Onboarding Task Force was charged to evaluate the College of Arts & Letters’ onboarding procedures for support staff. On August 24th, 2017 the task force submitted a draft proposal of our findings in which we outlined the following:

- What role does onboarding play in employee engagement and organizational success?
- What onboarding support is currently being provided to support staff?
- What do other peer institutions do as onboarding processes for support staff?
- What is a definition of successful onboarding?
- How can we measure successful onboarding?
- Who would benefit from onboarding?
- Who should be responsible for onboarding?

We also created a draft onboarding plan with phases for before the first day through the first year and beyond. As next steps, we identified the following tasks:

- Distribute survey to College of Arts & Letters support staff.
- Build a draft onboarding template.
- Explore the usability of ARO’s onboarding portal or an intranet similar to IPF’s Hub.
- Develop a training program to educate supervisors.
- Develop a series of surveys to quantitatively assess the success of onboarding going forward.

Task Force Membership
Jennifer Tetreau, LGSAAL and RCS – project manager
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Survey
As a group we determined that we would be best served for our purposes not to distribute a wide-reaching quantitative survey at this
point in our research. Instead, we decided to develop a series of open-ended qualitative questions that we can present in an interview style. We felt that the following questions would provide us with the types of answers that we can use to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of onboarding:

1. How long have you been employed by the College of Arts & Letters in your current position?
2. If different, how long have you been employed by Michigan State University?
3. Please provide a brief description of your first day of work in your current position. Your first week?
4. How would you describe your preparation for your current position before you started? How long after your initial hire would you say you considered yourself operational as an employee?
5. Are there issues you consider basic to your knowledge as an employee of CAL and/or MSU that you still don’t know, and wouldn’t readily know from any online resource?
6. In a short 5-10 word phrase, describe what your unit’s way of welcoming and training new staff members is.
7. In your opinion, from your own experiences and what you’ve seen experienced in other units in the College, who should be responsible for the fostering of a new employee into organization structure?
8. How long did it take you to get all the permissions, rights, and access to at least basically operate your current position?
9. How well do you see yourself entrenched as a co-worker and a colleague within your own unit? What unit, CAL, MSU, or other resource(s) might assist in further developing this socialization process?
10. To you, is there any difference between being a successful employee and a successful asset of the College of Arts & Letters? How do you view your own situation in these terms?
11. At this stage of your employment in the College of Arts & Letters, do you have any interest in sharing your skills and knowledge to help the onboarding of new employees in your unit?

Upon analysis of the responses to these questions (and follow-up questions), we determined that support staff have the following concerns that need to be taken into account when developing an onboarding program:
• **Access:** Employees are generally concerned about the time it took to gain full access to the programs and systems needed to learn and execute their jobs. Notably, the time it took to gain all access varied greatly from two days to upwards of two months. We determined that there needs to be standardization for the process of getting access for both current MSU employees new to CAL and new employees to the university.

• **Supervisor Involvement:** Some employees are concerned with the “hands-off” approach their supervisors took to the onboarding process. While we acknowledge that successful onboarding is only possible through supervisors and co-workers, we also note the lack of training for supervisors in the field of onboarding and employee engagement generally.

• **Boredom:** While waiting for access or training opportunities, some employees expressed feeling bored or underutilized. We have determined that a successful onboarding process will provide meaningful activities for new hires during frequent “downtime” in the first week of employment.

• **Isolation:** For a large part, employees report that they feel generally socialized in their respective units or departments, however the feeling is that there could be more done to help employees feel more connected to the college.

• **Connection to the “Big Picture”:** Related to the previous point, employees also felt disconnected from the big picture of their departments, the college, and the university. One employee suggested meeting with the highest administrator in the unit after the first week would help to understand the greater vision.

**Onboarding Template**
Attached to this report is our draft onboarding template. We found that the most successful onboarding programs were well-organized, highly structured, and transparent. We have created the first draft of an Onboarding & Orientation Guide to be used by supervisors of new employees. It contains the following documents:

• Supervisor’s Onboarding Planning Tool
• IT Access Worksheet
• Mandatory and Recommended Training
• New Employee Orientation Guide
This guide will help supervisors thoughtfully plan the onboarding phases for new employees. We think the recommendations from the Training and Mentoring groups will be easily incorporated into this structure to provide a complete document to guide employee development from before the first day through eventually becoming a mentor or trainer.

ARO Onboarding vs Intranet?
After meeting with Samantha Lake, ARO project lead, we have determined that the structure provided with ARO is not robust enough for our recommendation for the following reasons:

- **Customization** – ARO does allow for customized onboarding task lists, however each supervisor must have individual customized lists. There is also no way to overlay the onboarding lists so department-specific lists would need to be created by re-creating all CAL tasks for each and every supervisor. This process would be incredibly time-consuming and any changes or updates would need to be done on an individual basis. Furthermore, there is no way to retain lists when supervisor turnover happens. New supervisors would need to re-create the same list every time.

- **Length of onboarding** – Currently MSU’s ARO onboarding portal only allows for one month of tasks. After talking to an employee of Grand Valley State University we learned that ARO has the functionality to extend the timeline however MSU currently has no plans to implement this feature.

- **Transition to training and mentoring** – Assuming the recommendations of the Training and Mentoring teams will follow a timeline that will integrate with the mentoring timeline, we feel that the ARO onboarding portal is not sufficient to facilitate this transition. We feel that ARO is too focused on onboarding and it will not allow for a smooth transition to training while retaining consistency with values and mission.

We recognized the opportunity for not only standardizing the onboarding process with an intranet, but also the potential for linking onboarding to training and mentoring. We also feel that a developed intranet for CAL staff will help establish and reinforce connectivity among support staff and will allow for a simple and centralized method of information dissemination. We suggest that SharePoint is explored as an option for the CAL intranet.
Develop a Training Program to Educate Supervisors
A large part of the attached Onboarding & Orientation Guide is supervisor-focused. On a base-level, the information contained in the Supervisor’s Onboarding Planning Tool will be enough to provide structure and a minimum of training to a supervisor in order to provide new employees with a sufficient onboarding program. We recognize that formal training provided by either CAL HR or a selected support staff employee would be needed to fully utilize the onboarding program.

Develop a Set of Surveys to Quantitatively Assess Success
In order to coordinate the assessment of all processes – onboarding, training, and mentoring – we recommend a pulse survey be developed to send to employees on a monthly basis. The survey would need to be quick and simple, but still retain the detail needed to accurately and quantitatively assess program success and employee engagement. Best practice for pulse surveys suggests that creating a scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) provides the most valuable data. Some questions that we would like to consider are:

- I can see myself working for the College of Arts & Letters in the next five years.
- If given the chance, I would reapply for my current job.
- I have a clear understanding of CAL’s strategic goals.
- I am proud to be a part of my unit.
- I feel that I have a health work-life balance.

We also suggest that room be allowed for an optional but more qualitative answer – we feel that valuable information can be gathered and analyzed by giving employees room for meaningful feedback. We suggest that this open-ended question can be rotated monthly to keep it interesting. Some examples are:

- What would you say is the biggest challenge you’re facing in doing your job right now?
- If you were the Dean of CAL, what’s the first thing you would change as it relates to support staff?
- What is the one thing that would improve your productivity right now?
- What team event would you like to see next?

We would also like to see a space allotted monthly for a co-worker “shout-out” to recognize a team member who has done something exceptional. We can use these suggestions to feature an employee “superstar” on the CAL Support Staff Intranet.
Further Recommendations

In order to align the processes of onboarding, training, and mentoring with CAL and MSU values, we are recommending that a theme is established, similar to IPF’s “T-Shaped Employee.” We feel that a theme would not only tie together the process of employee development, but it would also allow for a sense of branding to help support staff excitement build regarding these processes. Recognizing the contribution that IPF has made in the field of employee development at MSU, we propose that our employee development program is based on the IPF model but also incorporates the work done on developing our onboarding, training, and mentoring process.

IPF’s T-Shaped Employee

CAL’s Tree-Shaped Employee
Building on the tree analogy, we recommend that an added aspect of employee development is introduced: recruitment. Just as we cannot turn a birch tree into an oak, there are certain core competencies unrelated to specific tasks and duties that cannot be onboarded, trained, or mentored into an employee. IPF recognizes eight skills and competencies required to build a successful team. CAL may agree with these eight skills, however we recommend that higher administration is involved to ensure that we are aligned with CAL strategic goals and values. We also recommend that the recruitment process (job postings, application ranking rubrics, and interview guides) be reconfigured to reflect the competencies.

To further align the Tree-Shaped Employee model with the College of Arts & Letters, we also suggest that we use “the resilient tree” just outside of Linton Hall as additional marketing for this effort. We feel that the story of this tree will resonate with support staff and it will help to reinforce CAL values and provide cohesion and added culture among units and departments.

In Summation
The following are our recommendations for development of an onboarding program that will transition with the training and mentoring
groups and, if successful, result in higher levels of employee engagement:

- A College of Arts & Letters Intranet similar to IPF’s Hub
  - We recommend exploring options and features of Microsoft’s SharePoint program.
  - We recommend that the intranet is developed with the following priorities:
    - Easy access to documents related to onboarding, training, and mentoring
    - Sign up option for “buddy” system (onboarding) and formal mentoring program
    - Sign up option to become a trainer (based on Training Task Force recommendations)
    - Establishment of a common area for distribution of CAL support staff information and communications

- Branding the entire Employee Development program (recruitment-onboarding-training-mentoring) with the Resilient Tree and the Tree-Shaped Employee model, acknowledging the significant contribution that IPF has made to our program.

- Consideration and development of the “core competencies” aligned with CAL and MSU values, which make up the leaves of the tree-shaped employee model. These competencies will need to “come from the top” and be communicated by CAL higher administration (Dean, Associate Deans, etc)

- Development of a recruitment and retention program continuing to align message with CAL/MSU values and the Resilient Tree branding/tree-shaped employee model.

- Development of a training system for supervisors to understand how best to use the recruitment-onboarding-training-mentoring program to best help employee development.

- Development and implementation of a “pulse survey” distributed monthly to CAL support staff to allow for both quantitative and qualitative assessment of employee engagement.
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