

Designing a continuing education program for Pacific Northwest restoration professionals

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Introduction

Continuing education opportunities are a vital component of a thriving professional community. It is especially important in ecological restoration, where scientific knowledge rapidly changes and practitioners need to follow newly established best practices in order to implement successful projects. Recent national surveys have found young professionals entering botanic fields from graduate programs to be lacking important professional skills. Authors have identified various ways to improve undergraduate restoration education, but continuing education opportunities could meet some needs of the field more efficiently. They provide a pathway into the field for individuals graduating from institutions without formal restoration programs and strengthen a professional community.

Several restoration professionals in the greater Seattle area have expressed a need for increased professional restoration development opportunities to staff at the University of Washington Botanic Gardens (UWBG). Botanic gardens are well suited to support restoration education, and restoration professionals have called on botanic gardens to increase their involvement in training practitioners. Staff requested assistance in evaluating the needs of the regional restoration community and developing an appropriate program.

Acknowledgements

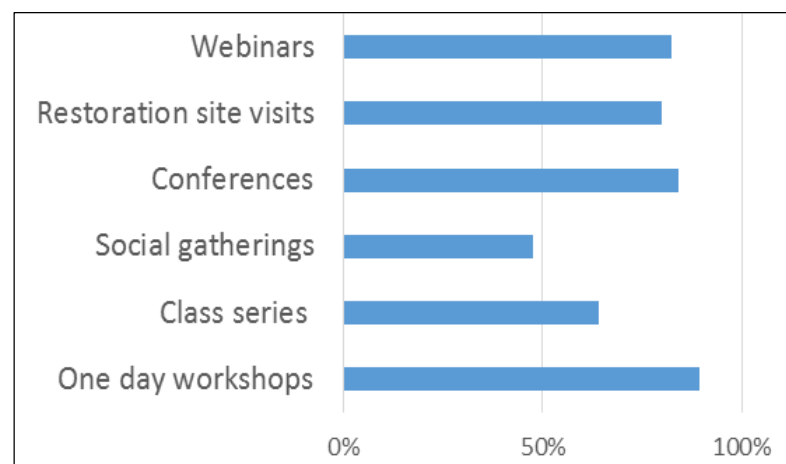
Thank you to UWBG, the Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association, SER, and to a very dedicated group of restoration professionals in the greater Seattle area for providing feedback and keeping this idea at the front of UWBG's mind.

Methods

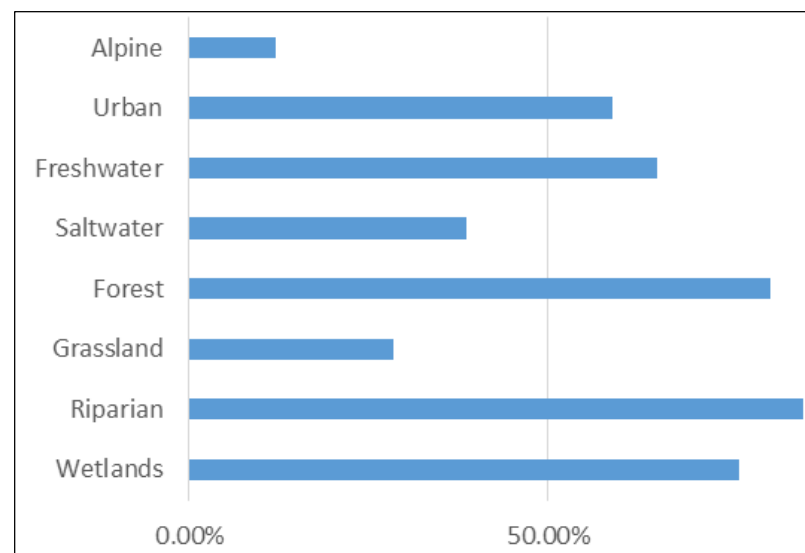
Survey: I administered a survey to the regional restoration community.

Program Review: I completed a program review to identify existing education and certification programs and interviewed other program managers.

Interviews: I spoke with individuals from partner groups and target audiences.



Above: % of survey participants who expressed interest in a possible course structure. **Below:** % of survey participants working in ecosystem types.



Results

Survey: 158 individuals completed the survey. 75% of participants would be interested in pursuing professional certification. Funding was the primary barrier to attendance.

Program Review: Over 40 programs were identified and evaluated to identify gaps.

Interviews: The interviews provided valuable guidance. I gathered information regarding current professional shortcomings, existing opportunities, concerns, and challenges.



The level of interest survey participants expressed in a variety of potential continuing education topics.

Conclusion and Next Steps

There is strong support for development of an affordable, regionally relevant continuing education program for restoration professionals.

I will submit a program proposal to UWBG suggesting they offer a suite of one day seminars, two day symposia and field trips. UWBG will evaluate my program proposal and may begin offering courses as part of a restoration focused program as early as fall 2016.



Group discussing restoration, credit to SER UW.