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"I'll Take Circulation Policies for 100, Alex" or Fostering the Team-Based Approach among Library Student Assistants

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"I'll Take Circulation Policies for 100, Alex" or Fostering the Team-Based Approach among Library Student Assistants

Description

The value of the contributions made by student workers to the mission of the academic library is well established in both theory and practice. The ACRL draft "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education 2003" includes specific mention of student assistants in terms of assigning responsibilities appropriate to their, "qualifications, training, experience and capabilities." (ACRL, 2003). Student workers are particularly important in small academic libraries where, because of limited budgets and personnel constraints, they often may be relied upon to a greater degree than in larger academic library settings.

Scheduling student assistants within any given library department is an art that requires juggling factors such as departmental need, the amount of work study funds assigned, as well as class schedules, social obligations, etc. This often results in a large number of students working a very limited number of hours with infrequent contact outside their departments, which can contribute to a lack of cohesion and formation of a common identity. If student assistants can be made to feel more a part of the total library organization, they may come to realize that their contributions are appreciated not only at the individual level, but also at the group level.

Keywords

Student assistants/College and university libraries, College and university libraries/Oregon

Disciplines

Library and Information Science

"I'll Take Circulation Policies for 100, Alex"

or

Fostering the Team-Based Approach among Library Student Assistants

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The value of the contributions made by student workers to the mission of the academic library is well established in both theory and practice. The ACRL draft "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education 2003" includes specific mention of student assistants in terms of assigning responsibilities appropriate to their, "qualifications, training, experience and capabilities." (ACRL, 2003). Student workers are particularly important in small academic libraries where, because of limited budgets and personnel constraints, they often may be relied upon to a greater degree than in larger academic library settings. Even in larger settings however, "[a]s libraries organizational structures change from hierarchical to team-based...student employees are given more responsibility to carry out tasks..." (Constantia, 1998) Such is certainly the case in the Harvey W. Scott Memorial Library at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon.

The Scott Memorial Library employs upwards of 53 student assistants across eight library departments during the academic year. At the Scott Library, as in other academic libraries, every effort is made to hire enthusiastic and responsible individuals, provide them with quality training, and compensate them appropriately. While professionally-designed application forms and interviews can help to identify individuals with enthusiasm and responsibility, and technologies such as WebCT can be employed to create personalized training modules for a variety of tasks, similar tools are lacking when it comes to the issues of morale and motivation.

Just scheduling student assistants within any given library department is an art that requires juggling factors such as departmental need, the amount of work study funds assigned, as well as class schedules, social obligations, etc. This often results in a large number of students working a very limited number of hours with infrequent contact outside their departments. This can create a situation that results in a fragmented student workforce that largely defines contributions to the overall mission of the library in terms of the specific work performed at the individual level. As a result, the student assistant workforce at may lack a sense of cohesion and common identity, which can contribute to low morale and poor motivation. All of this seemed to be true of the student assistant workforce at the Scott Memorial Library. If student assistants could be made to feel more a part of the total library organization, they might come to realize that their contributions are appreciated not only at the individual level, but also at the group level.

The Scott Library's approach to these concerns was to discuss them at a staff meeting and agree that any improvement effort should focus on creating a team-based approach to the work environment among student assistants, and improving student assistant training. These goals were chosen because the Library's faculty and staff were employing the team-based approach, and anything that might help student assistants retain training information was in the library's interest.

At this point a notice was sent to all library student assistants notifying them that a student assistant advisory panel was being formed to suggest ways to improve communication among student assistants, foster positive morale, and improve training. Students interested in serving on such a panel were invited to come to a meeting and share their ideas. Out of that meeting came the fact that students wanted to understand the day-to-day operation of the library, to know what was happening in other departments, and to learn more about the value of their contributions to the library's mission. The students attending the initial meeting opted to form a planning committee of five members composed of representatives from various library departments to recommend ways that the team-based approach could be promoted and training improved. Based on the positive response generated by the meeting of the student assistants and the formation of the planning committee, a staff member, the Circulation Department Supervisor, volunteered to serve both as advisor to the committee and liaison between that group and the Library's faculty, staff, and administration.

book in the catalog, determined if it was checked out, found the book on the shelves and brought it back to class to evaluate. We found they frequently chose books that were too technical or too old and noted these shortcomings when answering the questions on their worksheets. Again, this was a learning experience that clued them in to what to consider when looking at a catalog record or before checking out a book. This exercise also helped us recognize the need to make some changes in our collection management so that we purchased more books in some areas that fit the needs of undergraduates rather than researchers.

Looking Ahead

Now, looking toward fall 2003, we are considering which of these concepts and activities to formally adopt in our instruction. We are energized by the new approaches we can take, which make our jobs always interesting. There still is "button pushing" to be taught ("click on the periodical title to see the full record with the years owned by the library"), but

we feel the pendulum swinging more into the realm of teaching information literacy, rather than information technology. We also know that technology will change again, perhaps freeing a little more space and time for including larger concepts or perhaps moving us back a step, if enhancements make it harder for students to navigate. We will continue to adjust our teaching to current needs. The instruction pendulum will continue to swing, but since it is increasingly on a digital clock, we will continue to move forward.

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"I'll Take Circulation Policies for 100, Alex" or... - cont.

The student assistants planning committee was authorized to meet once a week and paid for the time they spent developing plans to meet the above-mentioned goals. Of the suggestions that the committee put forth, the one which was received most enthusiastically was a proposal for a "Jeopardy"-style competition, in which teams of library student assistants would compete with one another to answer questions derived from departmental training manuals and written policies and procedures in the departments where the students worked. The library administration approved a small budget for the competition that provided for the purchase of gift certificates from local merchants to be awarded as prizes for the competition. It was further agreed that to insure maximum attendance, the competition would be held on a Friday evening when the library closed early, and that pizza and soft drinks would be provided. Library staff members agreed to serve as moderators, timers, and scorekeepers for the competition. On the day of the competition, eight 3-person teams competed for the better part of an hour and a half, and after consuming numerous pizzas and bottles of soft drinks, a winning team emerged.

Of course, the real winners in the competition were the students on the planning committee who developed valuable organizational skills while sifting through suggestions, compiling the questions, and organizing the competition, the

students who saw the advantage of having members of different library departments on their teams who could respond to the variety of questions asked, and all those students who prepared for the competition by reviewing departmental training materials and departmental policies and procedures. It is also quite possible that a secondary benefited accrued from providing library faculty, staff, administrators, and student assistants an opportunity to share a meal together and participate in a common work-related, but "fun" activity.

Constantia Constantinou has stated that, "Training, motivating, and rewarding student library assistants is a perpetual learning experience." That is most certainly true at the Scott Library and as this year's student assistants are invited to form an advisory panel, we will have to wait and see what innovative suggestions they may have for making library student assistants feel that they are a part of the library workforce.

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Libraries Linking Idaho: History, Services, Vision - cont.

of adding the service to their existing activities. The project introduces libraries to interlibrary loan through the OCLC Web ILL system. Beginning as borrowers, library staff are learning to search and request items from locations never before available to them. The project is currently entering Phase 2, with participating libraries using OCLC's CatExpress to download MARC records and contribute their holdings to OCLC's WorldCat database. By doing so, the libraries are now able to share the unique items in their own collections.

Reciprocal Borrowing in Idaho. ISL's vision for a preferred future includes "continuous access and service to anyone, anywhere, anytime." In keeping with this vision, the menu of LiLI services will soon include Reciprocal Borrowing in Idaho (RBI). RBI is the newest of the LiLI services. There

are plans to roll it out for implementation in early 2004. The RBI program will allow Idaho libraries the option to provide reciprocal borrowing privileges to any Idaho library cardholder.

Training. At the heart of all the LiLI services is a dedication to access and a focus on the training and empowerment of the library community. This is accomplished with ongoing training opportunities on database searching, resource sharing, computer technology, and networking issues.

From the early stages of developing a Web site, to the implementation of statewide access to online databases, today LiLI remains a cooperative effort. Together, the Idaho State Library and the Idaho library community continue to improve library services for the citizens of Idaho.▨