



CHAPTER 1*

LEADING, LEARNING, AND EARNING:

Creating a Meaningful Student Employment Program

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Introduction

Student employment is vital to the functioning of academic libraries. Students are charged with a wide range of day-to-day tasks and often staff service points as the front line for patrons. Student employment provides libraries with an economical way to achieve many daily functions while providing individual students the benefit of a paycheck and work experience. Additionally, on-campus student employment has been shown to increase persistence, academic achievement, and student engagement.¹ Despite this symbiotic relationship, student employees are often underutilized, and little focus has been directed to creating employment programs that intentionally maximize individual student growth, development, and learning.

This chapter outlines the creation of a student-centered employment program at the University of Illinois Springfield's (UIS) Brookens Library

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and provides practical strategies for application. UIS, a public liberal arts university, is one of three universities in the University of Illinois system. With an approximate enrollment of 5,000 students, UIS is a teaching-focused institution with strengths in online education and public affairs programs. While student employees have always served an important role at Brookens Library, the library has not always placed their development in front of the library's needs. Student employees were underutilized, lacked knowledge of general library operations and customer service, and had little sense of ownership in their positions.

In the summer of 2013, the library prioritized reinventing the program by creating an environment where students were able to learn and demonstrate leadership and teamwork skills. This reinvention has resulted in the achievement of numerous positive outcomes, both organizationally and for individual students. Since implementing this change, the library has witnessed increased ownership and efficiency in its student workforce. As students became responsible for more tasks, full-time staff were able to reallocate time to meet increasing demand for new services and special projects. Likewise, students reported higher levels of ownership and satisfaction in the workplace and demonstrated increased competence in information literacy, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving. Some student employees have linked their employment to their continued persistence and graduation, and others have translated the skills learned in the library to obtain full-time jobs.

Background and Rationale

The Brookens Library User Services department underwent a reorganization and change in leadership during the spring of 2013. As the new director of learning commons and user services, Sarah Sagmoen (co-author) began an informal audit of services, policies, and operations. The unit was feeling the strain of implementing additional services with a flat budget and decrease in staff. Initial observations also showed a lack of buy-in from student employees and underutilization of student employees by library staff.

Concurrently, Sagmoen had been leading the library's effort to forge a partnership with the Office of Student Life. The offices joined forces to produce student programs, enhance library operations, and work collaboratively on a number of initiatives. Sagmoen reached out to a former student

affairs colleague and current PhD student in Higher Education Administration, Beth Hoag (co-author), to evaluate the student employment program. Hoag had a background in student affairs and 10 years of experience managing student employment programs.

Hoag came to Brookens in the summer of 2013 with the goal of evaluating the current student employment program and subsequently recommending changes based on student development and learning principles. The following were the initial goals of the program:

- Create a team environment where students are able to learn and demonstrate leadership and teamwork skills.
- Provide student employees the opportunity for advancement.
- Empower student employees to manage a broader range of library tasks and educate them on library mission and operations.
- Enhance student employees' customer service skills.
- Streamline current processes and procedures.

The User Services department employs a team of twenty to twenty-four student employees who are primarily undergraduates. When Hoag arrived, circulation student employees were assigned duties such as shelving and pulling materials, preparing materials for interlibrary loan and hold requests, and staffing the library's circulation desk. However, they only completed specific tasks within various workflows, with the steps considered more advanced to be completed by circulation supervisors. When staffing the library's circulation desk, student employees were limited to basic tasks such as checking materials in or out and answering directional questions. Patron interactions beyond these tasks required assistance from a circulation supervisor or librarian, often leaving the patron standing at the desk waiting. This resulted in circulations supervisors frequently being called to the desk, practically negating the purpose of employing students.

In the new employment model, students were given more responsibility and ownership of daily tasks. We implemented new hiring, training, and evaluation procedures and updated policies and procedures. Students became active members in guiding the direction of the department and identified ways to improve services, while linking their jobs to learning outcomes. During the fall of 2013, we expanded upon the redesign by creating two student manager positions. These students were responsible for assisting with new employee training, facilitating monthly staff meetings and serving as circulation managers.

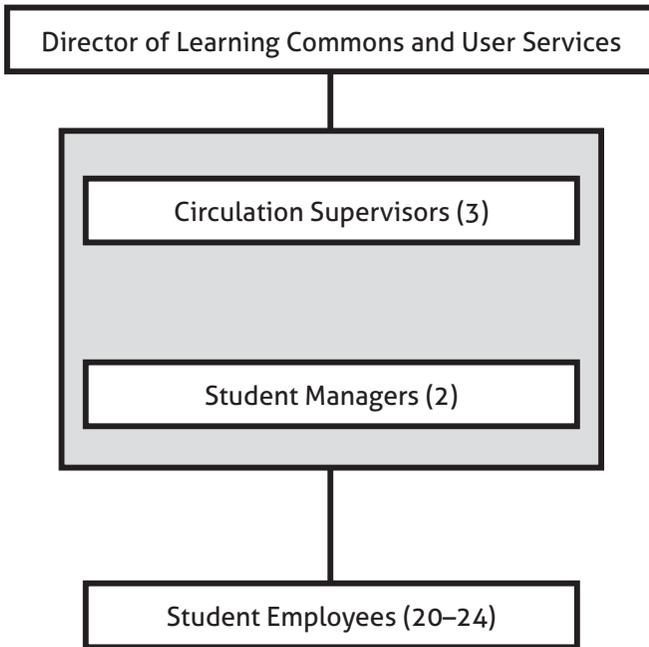


Figure 1.1. The newly created hierarchical structure of the User Services Department at Brookens Library.

Putting a Plan in Action

First Steps

To understand what changes needed to be made, we first conducted a thorough assessment of student employment policies, procedures, and practices. Hoag worked alongside student employees and assumed many managerial roles to get a grasp on day-to-day operations. This perspective allowed her to analyze workflow and identify areas where student employees could have a greater impact. As a non-librarian, she was able to bring a fresh set of eyes to common practices and procedures. Hoag had a background in student union management, which frequently relies on students to act as the sole evening facility supervisors. Her experience with students autonomously managing a wide breadth of operations challenged library staff to expand their understanding of student responsibilities.

During the planning stages, we worked to build buy-in across the library staff. Hoag met with User Services staff to learn more about their

position and their perception of student employment. She shared potential ideas and received frequent feedback. The dean had been supportive of the initiative and the topic was discussed at staff meetings. In addition, Hoag met with all current student employees to gauge their understanding of the job and possible improvements.

Based on this feedback, we set forth to create a comprehensive student manual that clearly articulated policies and procedures. Each existing policy and procedure was first reviewed and revised to create clear employment expectations and to set up students for success. One of our primary goals was to enable students to independently complete a wider range of tasks and have the knowledge to provide exceptional customer service. Overall, our policies had been unclear, punitive, or non-existent. Additionally, students did not have a central resource they could consult for procedures (e.g., checking out books, emergency procedures, shelf reading procedure, and requesting time off). We designed a student employment manual that covered institutional employment policies and procedures, emergency procedures, and library policies and procedures. (See Figure 1.2). This process also allowed us to identify redundancies in our practices. For example, student employees were completing some tasks that were then re-done by library staff. Conducting an analysis of our procedures enabled us to eliminate this duplication of work, and free up more time for our library staff members.

INSTITUTIONAL EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> University Paperwork <input type="checkbox"/> Pay Rates, Time Sheets and Pay Schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Employee Rights and Responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> FERPA 	LIBRARY POLICIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Overdue Fines <input type="checkbox"/> Charges <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Policies <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Borrowers <input type="checkbox"/> Library Equipment Checkout
EMERGENCY PROCEDURES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> General Evaluation Guidelines <input type="checkbox"/> Fire, Tornado, Utility Failure <input type="checkbox"/> Active Shooter, Bomb Threat <input type="checkbox"/> Harassing Customers, Depressed/ Suicidal Customers 	LIBRARY EMPLOYEE PROCEDURES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service & Phone Tips <input type="checkbox"/> Printing/Copying/Faxing <input type="checkbox"/> Charging/Discharging/InterLibrary Loan <input type="checkbox"/> Call Slips <input type="checkbox"/> Rounds <input type="checkbox"/> Shelf Reading
LIBRARY EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Coverage Procedures, Calling in for Illness <input type="checkbox"/> Tardiness <input type="checkbox"/> Dress Code/Uniforms <input type="checkbox"/> Food, Drink, Electronic Devices <input type="checkbox"/> Friends and Socializing <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Reviews <input type="checkbox"/> Disciplinary Procedures 	APPENDICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> User Services Contact Info <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently Used Numbers <input type="checkbox"/> Extended Hours Checklist <input type="checkbox"/> FAQ <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Review Template

Figure 1.2. Employment manual outline.

Hiring

In order to implement our vision of a student-centered, team-based model for employment, we needed to modify the hiring process. We initially identified the primary skills and characteristics that would qualify a student for a position and determined six assessment areas for potential applicants: team-orientated, attention to detail, customer service, reliability, knowledge of campus resources, and strong communication skills. In the past, library knowledge and usage were a determining factor in the hiring process, but we eliminated this criterion. We noted that these skills could be taught and we wanted to create a diverse student team that included students less familiar with our programs and services, as we felt they could provide critical insight and recommendations.

Since the creation of the program, we have made it a continued priority to recruit a diverse pool of applicants. In order to achieve this, we have implemented a variety of outreach strategies such as tabling, new-student orientation, website ads, and soliciting recommendations from Student Life staff. Currently, a large component of our recruiting process occurs at the annual on-campus employment fair, which also allows us the opportunity to interact with applicants.

Next, we examined the job description and application. University policy requires all student employment postings and applications be funneled through Career Connect, an online career development portal accessible to all students. Students must upload a résumé and use the system to apply for both on- and off-campus positions. This process is standardized and offered little opportunity to tailor an initial application to our specific needs. Additionally, Brookens Library had consistently received a high number of applications for open positions and needed a more robust process to assess and select the best candidates.

We implemented an additional information form that was sent to candidates after applying through Career Connect. We asked specific questions about availability and overall interest in the position. One question listed our identified characteristics of a successful employee, and applicants were asked to choose their strongest characteristic from the pre-determined list and describe why they felt it was a strength. In order to move forward in our hiring process, candidates were required to complete the form by the deadline and correctly follow all instructions on the form. We continue to use the pre-screening process as a way to narrow our candidate pool.

Qualified applicants were invited for an interview. Interviews were scheduled sequentially and lasted approximately fifteen minutes in length. (See Figure 1.3 for list of sample interview questions.) Since the implementation of our new model, student managers assist with interview scheduling, question formation, and are actively involved in the interview process. Successful candidates are chosen by consensus (staff supervisor and student managers) and decisions are based on the pre-determined criteria with special emphasis placed on the candidate's demonstrated ability to work in a team environment.

- Tell us about yourself
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Describe your most challenging college experience
- What three words would a past supervisor or professor use to describe you?
- How do you currently use the library?
- What do you hope to learn from your library employment?
- Tell us about a time you worked on a team. What went well and what challenges did you face? How did you manage the challenges?
- Why do you think you would be successful at this job?
- What student organizations or activities have you been involved in on campus?
- Of the six identified characteristics that describe a strong user services employee. Choose one that is your greatest strength and one that you would need to improve.

Figure 1.3. Sample interview questions.

Orientation, Training, and Development

Once new employees are hired, they participate in a multi-phase training process. During the first phase, new employees participate in an orientation where they are given an overview of library operations and discuss the role of the academic library. Student employees also have the opportunity to meet and interact with the dean of the library, library staff, and librarians. Additionally, students review the student manual, discuss expectations and responsibilities, and are tested on policies and procedures.

Next, new employees shadow returning student employees on various job tasks. New employees are given a copy of the manual and a checklist of tasks to learn. Schedules are intentionally designed for new employees to shadow multiple employees with various tasks and shifts.

The weekend before the semester begins, all student employees (returning and new) are required to attend a mandatory half-day retreat.

Student managers are primarily responsible for planning the retreat agenda. The main goals of the retreat are to build relationships and enhance teamwork skills. The day begins with a series of interactive team builders designed to test team communication and their ability to work together. These activities are completed as a group and students are asked to draw connections to their work environment. All students are required to set personal goals for the semester and undergo training to refresh knowledge of tasks or learn new tasks.

The final phase occurs about a month after new employees start employment. Supervisors and student managers shadow employees, conduct checks on various tasks, and ask students to explain the process to evaluate mastery. Additionally, secret shoppers are sent in at various times to assess customer services skills. If an employee performed less than satisfactorily, additional training was provided.

In addition to the training process, learning and development is ongoing. We implemented mandatory monthly staff meetings that give students an opportunity to provide feedback, network with peers, and take on various projects. Student managers run the meetings and often include team-building or other skills-based activities, such as customer service activities. Regular staff meetings also provide an opportunity to discuss changes and make corrections with the entire staff while promoting peer feedback and support.

Reference Training

At the time the employment program was being revised, the library was struggling to staff the library's reference desk, which had seen declining use. Librarians were increasing instruction and outreach efforts, and staffing a seldom-used desk, located five feet from the circulation desk, became increasingly hard to justify.

After researching alternative models, we decided to expand student support at the reference desk and move to a peer-to-peer reference model to capitalize on peer learning. We removed the reference desk and went to a one-desk service model with librarians on-call should patrons need advanced reference assistance. The positive effects of using undergraduate students in a peer-to-peer reference model have been well-documented. Student benefits include impressive résumés, increased pride in work, and improved researcher skills.² Libraries also experience benefits

beyond relieving staffing issues, including access to the student point of view and improved morale.³ Additionally, peer reference services better match student patron needs, as students feel more comfortable approaching a peer.⁴

This move required student employees to have basic reference training. Sagmoen created a three-tiered training program that serves as continuing education for student employees. During the second half of a new student employee's first semester, they complete the first tier of training. The second tier is completed during their second semester, and the third tier during their third semester.

Reference Training Tiers:

- Tier 1: Known item searching (two ninety-minute sessions)
- Tier 2: Basic searching skills and understanding library search tools (five sixty-minute sessions)
- Tier 3: Advanced searching and reference interviews (five sixty-minute sessions)

The curriculum, which utilizes active learning techniques, is taught by a combination of student managers, circulation supervisors, and librarians. Student learning is assessed at the end of each tier before a student employee moves on to the next tier. The impact of this training is not limited to the library. While students become better equipped to answer basic reference inquiries at the desk, they also increase the research skills needed for their course work. In her exit survey, student employee Emma stated, "I owe a lot of my academic success to the reference training I received. Research assignments are less intimidating because I'm familiar with the library's resources and I can navigate the library's collection with confidence."

Student Managers

Our initial changes and efforts in training and increased responsibility provided us with a solid base from which the new employment model could grow. As student employees were given more responsibility, those who excelled took on an active role in training new student employees and were given special projects. This quickly opened up leadership opportunities. Not surprisingly, leaders emerged quickly and leadership positions were formalized through the creation of two student manager positions in the fall of 2013.

In addition to serving as team leaders for the student employee team, student managers are fully trained circulation supervisors. They open and close the library, perform supervisor-level tasks at the desk and throughout the library, train student employees, work on special projects, and help plan and facilitate staff meetings and retreats. They participate in department meetings and serve on library committees, providing a student voice to departmental and library decisions.

House Cup

To enhance our team-based model and simultaneously update our ineffective “three strikes and you’re out” disciplinary model, we created our version of the House Cup. Taking inspiration from the House Cup in the Harry Potter book series, the program allows us to reward those modeling good behavior by awarding them positive points, as well as issue negative points for infractions. Using a point system allows us to address small infractions early before they become habits and place students at risk of being terminated.

At the beginning of each semester, students are divided into four teams, or houses: Gryffinbook, Ravenbook, Booklepuff, and Shhhlytherin. Throughout the semester they are awarded points for going above and beyond, or docked points for infractions. As students accrue points, they are added to those of their housemates to tabulate a house’s points. Totaling individual student points as house points provides a common goal and encourages housemates to work as a team to help individuals who may be struggling. When ten negative points have been accrued by an individual, the student meets with a supervisor and is placed on probation. During the probation meeting, supervisor and student work together to create a plan of action that will help the student meet expectations and job responsibilities more successfully. When the plan has been met, the probation status is removed. Each student’s progress is tracked using a spreadsheet and incorporated into annual evaluations.

Additionally, houses serve as small groups in which the students often complete activities during the monthly staff meetings. Individual point leaders and the house leader are recognized at staff meetings each month and congratulated for their hard work. The program has helped students succeed by reinforcing expectations consistently and fairly and acknowledging those who are modeling good behavior.

Student Evaluation

In addition to the House Cup, students are assessed using an annual formal review process. Students first complete a self-assessment of their performance. Meanwhile, the student managers and supervisor complete a similar assessment, which includes knowledge of duties, reliability, quality of work, customer service, and judgment. The student employee and supervision team have a formal meeting to compare results, discuss personal goals, and offer feedback. Although this is an annual process, new employees have an initial evaluation at the end of their first semester to provide formal feedback early in their time at the library.

Recommendations for Implementing a Student-Centered Employment Program

Many of the elements created for the student employment program at Brookens Library can easily translate to other libraries and be scaled based on institution size. Through researching, building, and continuously evolving the program at Brookens Library, we have established seven recommendations for libraries wanting to implement a robust, student-centered program:

1. Put students first.
2. Find the right people.
3. Identify competencies and outcomes.
4. Develop clear policies and procedures.
5. Provide opportunity for continued learning and advancement.
6. Build a team atmosphere.
7. Create a cycle of assessment and evaluation.

The remainder of this chapter will provide suggestions for successful implementation of each recommendation.

Put Students First

The first step when creating meaningful student employment opportunities is to commit to a *student first* mindset that puts student learning and success at the forefront of employment. Consider employment through the lens of holistic learning and development⁵ and identify a philosophy that places student outcomes above organizational outcomes. Find ways to integrate student involvement into all phases of the employment pro-

cess, from hiring to evaluation. Provide avenues for student input and involve experienced student employees in the hiring process for new team members. Identify students that excel at certain tasks and assign them to train new hires. Think about designing programs that gradually add more responsibilities for students such as employee scheduling, staff training, reference support, facility management, and peer supervision.

Central tenets of our philosophy include believing student employees could perform advanced tasks, act autonomously, supervise peers, and create connections between employment and coursework. We actively promoted these tenets to library staff and current student employees to increase buy-in for the changing program.

During our process, some colleagues expressed concerns that students would be unable to take on additional responsibilities because in the past they witnessed students producing mediocre work with fewer responsibilities. We argued that students were underperforming in the old model because of a lack of trust and low expectations. Students were falling prey to a self-fulfilling prophecy and only achieving the low expectations the position required.

As student employees learned more about the library and were trusted with more responsibilities, their sense of belonging and commitment to the library grew. We quickly discovered that by putting students first, many began to excel as employees and as students. Matt, a former student manager stated, “Working at Brookens was an integral part in my academic success. My supervisors and co-workers motivated me to work at a higher level, and were there to support me in every way. Without Brookens Library I would not have graduated.”

Find the Right People

The program’s success and ability to continue to grow and evolve is due in large part to the strong foundation provided by Hoag and the continued support of the library dean. Brookens Library was lucky in that it was able to bring in a professional to help in this endeavor. Bringing in a professional is certainly an easy recommendation to make, but it may not be feasible for all libraries. There are, however, alternatives that could benefit you greatly.

Within your institution there are professionals who could serve as excellent allies. Start by reaching out to colleagues in student affairs with

whom you have a working relationship. While they may not be the right people, they should be able to point you in the right direction. If you do not have a colleague to contact, here are some common student affairs departments who may be willing to help:

- Student Life/Student Activities
- New Student Programs and Orientation
- Career Services
- Student Union
- Recreation Services

If your institution has a College Student Personnel/Higher Education degree program, consider providing an internship or graduate employee-ship for a student who is working toward a degree in college student personnel or other relevant areas of the higher education field.

Identify Competencies & Outcomes

When designing an employment program, it is important to start with the end in mind. Identify competencies and learning outcomes you want students to achieve and design a program to fulfill these outcomes. Consider using existing frameworks or institutional learning outcomes to guide your program. The National Association of Colleges Employers (NACE) identified seven competencies that are essential for new college graduates: (a) critical thinking/problem solving, (b) oral/written communication, (c) teamwork/collaboration, (d) information technology application, (e) leadership, (f) professionalism/work ethic, and (f) career management.⁶ These competencies could be used as a guide to integrate student employment, academic learning, and career readiness.

Additionally, the Association of American College and Universities (AACU) identified essential learning outcomes as part of their Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative (AACU, 2005). These sixteen outcomes serve as guideposts for liberal education and include skills such as inquiry/analysis, teamwork/problem solving, information literacy, and intercultural knowledge and competence. AACU also provides assessment rubrics for each outcome.

As we designed our program, we identified several core competencies that we wanted students to achieve through their work at Brookens Library, including teamwork, oral communication/customer service, professionalism, leadership, and information literacy. These competencies served as a

roadmap for our decision making. When designing the reference training component, we utilized ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards* and *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* as a starting point and incorporated institutional information literacy outcomes.

Develop Clear Policies and Procedures

In order to set students up for success, it is important to create a single written guide/manual/wiki that contains employment expectations and policies. Think about your employment manual as a class syllabus that outlines individual and group expectations and provides all relevant employment policies. Ensure the manual is reviewed with students during orientation and revisited by staff and updated regularly.

When creating an employment manual, start by conducting an analysis of any existing employment policies and expectations. Consider the following questions when reviewing policies:

- Is it necessary?
- Is it up-to-date?
- Is it practical?
- Do students know the policy exists? If so, is it easily accessible?
- Is it streamlined?
- Why does it exist? Does the policy articulate a rationale?
- Does this policy encourage students to take ownership of the task/action?

Our first policy change was to implement a *shift coverage policy* that placed responsibility on the student employee and not on the supervisor. Students were welcome to switch shifts or cover for each other at will, provided they do not exceed maximum hours allowed per week. Shift coverage did not need to be pre-approved by a supervisor, but students were asked to send a confirmation of their shift coverage to the supervisor. This change in the coverage procedures forced students to be more responsible when planning days off and encouraged students to work together to find coverage solutions. Prior to this change, we found many shifts were left vacant because the supervisor did not have adequate time to assign a replacement. Following the implementation of the policy, unstaffed shifts drastically decreased and students who wanted more hours were accommodated.

Once policies are created, routinely discuss them with students and address infractions immediately. When reviewing policies, pro-

vide rationale and background to contextualize the policy for students. Although, some policies and expectations may be inflexible (e.g., tardiness, break time, FERPA), others may be able to be discussed and decided as a group (e.g., dress code, switching shifts). Consider having the student employees create group expectations they will collectively uphold.

Finally, compile a list of common procedures (charging/discharging books, inter-library loan processing, building rounds checklist) and provide detailed instructions in the manual. Although initially time consuming, this is invaluable for on-boarding new employees, and students are empowered to teach themselves if they need to brush up on how to read a call number or process an inter-library loan book.

Provide Opportunities for Continued Learning and Advancement

As you create/update your employment program, you will find a variety of opportunities for continued learning. Continued learning can occur during training retreats, staff meetings, or as a part of a larger training program such as the reference training program utilized at Brookens. Customer service, communication, critical thinking, or advanced job knowledge are excellent topics as they are always areas of growth.

Numerous studies have shown that students learn best from peers;⁷ due to this, we emphasized a peer-led approach to training. When new students are hired, they shadow returning employees and are trained on processes by student managers. Students have found this process to be less intimidating than learning from staff members and have effectively mastered procedures. This method has also provided seasoned student employees the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of the position and improve oral communication skills.

Similarly, there are a myriad of formal and informal opportunities for advancement. Creating positions such as team leaders or student managers allows for students to be promoted within the program. The benefits of creating formal leadership positions for student employees impact both the student and the library. While serving in this role, student managers are able to develop valuable skills such as peer supervision, conflict management, leadership, and critical thinking, all while freeing up time for professional library staff to undergo new initiatives.

As students demonstrate strengths and express interests, consider providing them the opportunity to take on a special project or serve as a library ambassador at campus events.

Projects and events student employees have assisted with at Brookens include:

- Planning library events (e.g. Annual Haunted Library)
- Creating and facilitating activities for new student orientations (e.g. mini-golf tour of the library)
- Staffing the library's table at information fairs for prospective or new students and families
- Providing library tours
- Serving as assistants during library instruction
- Creating book or DVD displays

Providing opportunities for students to take on special projects and serve as library ambassadors provides them with skill sets desired by employers. Skills such as the “ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside of the organization” and “ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work.”⁸

Build a Team Atmosphere

As students graduate and enter the workplace, they are increasingly expected to excel in a team environment. In a 2015 survey of employers, 79 percent indicated they were looking for candidates that clearly demonstrated the ability to work in a team environment.⁹ Collaborative work teams have been known to increase service delivery¹⁰ and employee satisfaction.¹¹ Equally, it is important to develop a culture in which students feel connected and supported by the organization and colleagues.

An essential step to creating a team environment is to devote training time to team-building activities. Reach out to student affairs professionals in areas such as student activities, leadership programs, new student program, or recreational sports, who actively engage in team-building activities, to suggest examples, or assist with facilitation. Additionally, there are numerous online resources and books that provide activities aimed at developing stronger teams.

Prior to changing our employment model, students primarily worked in isolation, only seeing colleagues during shift changes. As we implemented regular team meetings and emphasized a team approach to projects,

students began to help one another and better serve patrons. Laura, one former student employee, commented on the change, “I remember coming back to the library after the summer for fall 2013 staff training and one student said that the main change is, ‘We actually talk to each other now!’ I enjoyed working at the library before the changes, but after that summer I think a new sense of teamwork, leadership, and communication really entered the student workers and library staff.”

Create a Cycle of Assessment and Evaluation

Effective evaluation programs include individual performance assessment, reflection, and goal setting. Evaluation forms and processes should be presented to students upon hiring. This provides students with a clear understanding of performance expectations and helps students identify growth areas. Students should also be provided the opportunity to set personal learning goals throughout the academic year.

Create an evaluation program that allows you to provide feedback in the moment as well as formal review meetings. Using a points system, like the House Cup used at Brookens, allows you to issue points, both positive and negative, that match the action. Small infractions result in one negative point, while large infractions result in upward of ten negative points. When creating a points system, start with a list of expectations and assign points values for common actions to ensure consistency. Additionally, create a scale for negative points to be issued for minutes late to work. For example:

Minutes Late Scale: 1–10 = -1, 11–20 = -2, 21–30 = -3, 30+ = -5

Issuing points in the moment and then tracking them throughout the semester will allow you to continuously provide feedback and build data to be used for formal evaluations.

Formal reviews should be conducted annually and focus on student development. Involve appropriate supervisors, staff, or student leaders who can speak to each student’s performance when preparing the review. Reflection can be incorporated into the evaluation process by requiring students to self-assess their performance in preparation for the review. Comparing the scores from all parties provides an opportunity for reflection and discussion.

In addition to assessing student success, it is important to assess the overall effectiveness of the employee program. Provide opportunities for

students to provide regular feedback on the program through informal and formal channels. Engage student managers and supervisors in reflection and seek to actively improve your model. Examine data from library surveys and assessments to provide insight on student employment. Finally, have student employees conduct exit surveys upon graduation to encourage personal reflection and to gather data on desired outcomes.

Conclusion

The impact of a student-first employee program on libraries can be profound. By putting students first, both student employees and staff become more engaged and dedicated to improving library services. Giving students more responsibility frees staff time for new initiatives and increased services, especially at times when staffing and budgets are flat. Most important, taking an active role in student success outside of the traditional academic role shows students that the library is invested in their whole college experience.

Notes

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