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Hiring and Training Work-Study Students: A Case Study

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This paper describes the implementation of a comprehensive hiring and training program for library work-study students designed to reduce the time spent on individual training. After staff reductions, Marygrove College Library in Detroit, Michigan turned to an underutilized resource--work-study students. Formerly, training these students took so much permanent staff time that the library questioned investing so much effort on a contingent work force. With the cuts, the library reconsidered the value of work-study employees and devised a hiring and training program to choose the best candidates for the position and to reduce the effort full-time staff spent training new workers.

Keywords: Marygrove College Library; student employees; work-study students; library training; hiring of student employees; training of student employees

Problem Statement

In these lean economic times when many libraries are experiencing budget cuts, or at the least flat budgets, creative staffing solutions are needed more than ever. While almost every library has been hit hard by the economy, a small library, such as Marygrove College, located in Detroit, Michigan, can be devastated by a reduction in staff. Since 2008, the library has lost two full-time positions and two thirty-five hour per week part-time positions. This left the library with five full-time librarians and two full-time library assistants to keep the library open seventy hours a week during the academic year. While library staff were relieved that the eliminated positions were vacant with no layoffs resulting, the library was left considerably understaffed for its schedule of operating hours. As a result, the library had had to look for ways by which it could continue providing patrons with the same level of service with fewer staff.

Although different solutions to address the staffing shortage were considered, it was decided that the best course would be to better utilize work-study students.

In the past, hiring work-study students to work in the library had been tricky. This was due, in part, to the library's previous hiring and training practices as well as the unpredictability of work-study funds. Gerlich comments that "students are costly in terms of money, time and training--and most often their output is not worth the expense." (146) There had been many instances throughout the years where the library would hire and train a work-study student only to have financial aid change the amount allotted for work-study or for funds to be taken away entirely. Other problems the library encountered with work-study employees were their overall unreliability, disinterest in library work, and tendency to socialize with classmates while on the desk. The library felt that hiring more suitable candidates might resolve these problems. To achieve this goal, the library decided to try a different approach.

Ultimately, the library could change only what was under its control, which was to develop a hiring and training program that would be able to select the right person for the job and train them in such a way as to not strain an already stressed department. Jane Kathman and Michael Kathman (2000) suggest that "by not giving adequate attention to training, supervisors run the risk of not only the inefficient use of valuable resources, but also a bad employment situation for the student, the supervisor, and the library." (176) By developing a universal training program for work-study students, each student would receive the same training and thereby eliminate inconsistencies and reduce the time commitment involved with individual training.

Ideally, the Marygrove College Library would like to hire students who have a vested interest in the library as a career. While this is sometimes possible, it is not always a viable solution. While the articles discussed in the literature review all pose various pros and cons of using student employees to meet library staffing needs, each one presents feasible suggestions that can be used to develop a training program that addresses the variety of issues that come up when using a contingent work force. In short, problems that arise from a student work force can be reduced by using descriptive language that is task oriented when creating job descriptions, by employing creative interviewing tactics designed to match the job description to student abilities, by developing an interactive

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instruction training program designed to be completed by the trainee without the supervision of the core library staff, and by effectively communicating information in a central location.

Literature Review

Student employees have been working in libraries for quite some time. The American Library Association reports in a 1926 survey that there was extensive use of students in college and university libraries, quite often with major responsibilities. A review of the literature shows that effectively training student workers is not a recent issue. For the purpose of organization, the review will be arranged chronologically.

White (1985) acknowledges that student assistants had become a primary support in academic libraries and contends that this is in part due to a reassessment of student capabilities. She points out that the history of student employment in academic libraries reveals three major concurrent philosophical positions. The first is that the student assistant has been seen as an "expediter of library processes and procedures" (94). The second, quite contrary to the first, is that the student worker is seen as a co-worker and "unofficial colleague" (94). While the third sees the student worker as being "selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated according to an organized program that purports to develop student potential in library work" (94). White goes on to say that "from this moderate attitude there also seems to have evolved the recruitment zeal of the library profession, the active, admitted consideration of student assistants as potential librarians" (94). It is the attitude of the second and third philosophy that Marygrove Library's student worker training program would adopt.

The Kathmans assert that "if libraries do not provide consistent, quality service their competitors will take away large parts of the market." (176) Student workers play an important role in the image of the library and the timely delivery of services. For this situation to be successful, a student employee training program is essential. The Kathmans suggest that the way to begin is by developing a well-written job description that clearly defines performance measures accompanied by a well-structured interview that weeds out students not suited to the job. In addition, "pre-employment education can assist in communicating the library's culture and defining the type of work relationship the supervisor wishes to

establish." (178) They also suggest an orientation to communicate the library's mission, goals, and objectives. A training program should then be designed that starts before the beginning of a semester. Follow-up training and training evaluation should be integrated into the training program (179-81).

Poole et al. (2001) speak about the problems encountered in providing in-depth, consistent training to a large number of students on an individual basis. In order to prepare students to handle all of the different responsibilities of working in a library, they created an interactive instruction program that encompasses four major skill sets: basic customer service, the handling of periodicals, the handling of reserve materials, and instruction in the Integrated Library System (ILS). This program allowed students to train without the presence of a supervisor. Students were then assessed in each of the four skill sets and needed a score of 75% or higher to pass a section. Students could repeat the program as many times as necessary to pass the assessment. In most cases, students passed three out of four sections. The ability to train students without a supervisor present frees library staff to continue their own day-to-day job duties. This style of training also addresses the need to retrain student workers, a situation that library supervisors frequently encounter. With an interactive instruction program, the students are responsible for their own learning; and they can revisit the training materials at any time.

Gerlich questions whether student employees are worth the cost considering their output, their low retention rate, and overall lack of interest in their work. She places student workers in the category of contingent workers and points out that "part-time workers generally impose higher overhead costs per hour in hiring, training and supervision, and administration than do full-time workers." (147) While Gerlich admits that there are always some exceptional student workers, she suggests that libraries use their professional energies more wisely.

With an opposing viewpoint, Salisbury (2007) identifies the problem as how to "mold a capable, motivated workforce out of what is essentially a transient flow of humanity." (para. 1) She goes on to list other problems such as a lack of understanding, poor attendance, and irresponsibility; however, she contends that, through training, motivation, and communication, these problems can be lessened. Salisbury suggests that one way to weed a long list of applicants is to require students to take an introductory library course: "This is a one-credit course which teaches

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students how to use the resources of the library including the online catalog and research databases; how to evaluate websites; recognizing and avoiding plagiarism; copyright and fair use issues; government documents, and library classification systems.” (para. 10) Another possible criterion for selecting student workers is to look for second semester freshmen or sophomores, since hiring them will enable the library to keep the same employee for two to three years. Salisbury suggests that students be hired at the end of the semester and go through an in-depth training process with pay (para. 15). After training, new hires shadow more experienced student workers for eighteen to twenty-three hours (para. 16). With good communication, by challenging students with increased responsibility, and through rewarding them for a job well-done, student employees can be a win-win situation for all.

Hillyard and Whitson (2008) discuss their findings from a case study about creating a universal interactive training program that could be used to train temporary employees to work in multiple departments across the campus of the University of Washington Bothell. Several departments with experience in working together and with similar procedures found that they relied upon the same pool of temporary workers. In order to provide consistent service, they devised one training program that could be used interdepartmentally. Common themes throughout training were to teach about providing basic customer service, describe the mission of the units, address diversity issues, and review safety practices. Training units included, “Who Are Our Customers,” “Review of Policies,” “Customer Service Scenarios,” and a “Discussion with Public Safety.” The units consisted of participation exercises and active learning. At the end of the training, “Feedback” forms were passed out. The researchers found that very few students knew anything about the basics of campus safety, such as where emergency doors were located. The training program will remain fluid and adaptable and will continue to change as needed to increase its effectiveness.

Epstein (2010) reports that the circulation staff at Staley Library at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois has begun to use Blackboard to train student employees. By developing an online tutorial and delivering it through Blackboard, work-study students are able to go under “Course Documents” and view tutorials that cover topics such as the *Library Code of Ethics* and how to provide good customer service by recognizing the population served. In addition, Blackboard also allows for quizzes to be

posted, which makes assessing the Blackboard training easy and convenient. Work schedules and messages are also posted on Blackboard so that communication occurs in one central place. Epstein contends that Blackboard is a promising tool for student employee training.

Changes Made at the Marygrove Library

In order to attract candidates who possessed the desired skills, Marygrove Library chose to write a job description using task-oriented language describing the necessary skills needed to complete the job. This job description was created after many years of attracting mediocre candidates. The library often did not know the skills its student workers needed to possess until it had already determined that the student did not possess them. By looking back upon past hiring mistakes, the library was able to come up with a job description that communicated the library's real needs. (The job description appears in Appendix A.)

For multiple reasons, the first minimum qualification is for the applicant to possess a 3.0 grade point average or better. Not only does this requirement narrow the pool of applicants, but it is also more likely for a student who is serious about their studies to be serious about their job. The library also seeks students with both strong interpersonal and technology skills. These skills are a must for the library work-study student since they interact daily with other students and must regularly address technology-related problems.

Another requirement is the ability to multi-task. The circulation desk is often quite busy. It is not uncommon for the phone to ring and the copier to malfunction while a line of students waits to check out books. Being able to keep your cool under fire is essential. Another skill requested, but not required, is the ability to operate a multi-line phone system. The library is willing to teach this fairly straight forward task to the right candidate. Flexibility and reliability are also essential. The sole purpose for having work-study students staff the desk is to allow full-time staff to catch up on back room work. While students do not generally open or close, there are instances, due to extenuating circumstances, when this is unavoidable. For this reason, students are expected to be on time and ready to work for their scheduled shift. Since weekend coverage is important, work-study students must be available to work on Saturday and Sunday. That is not to say that the library is inflexible. We realize that

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they are students and will work with them to schedule work hours around their classes. The library also tries to accommodate work-study students when scheduling during exam time so that students have time to prepare for their finals.

Other requirements include a strong attention to detail and accuracy with numbers and numerical sequences. One of the hardest things to teach work-study students is how the Dewey Decimal System works. For the most part, students either grasp this concept easily or not at all. Before a candidate is interviewed, they take a tutorial on the Dewey Decimal System. While it is not required that they learn it in one sitting, one can usually determine, by the logic of their answers, if they will be able to master it. For a student to be considered as a serious candidate, they must demonstrate that they at least understand the concept of call numbers and how library books are shelved. Even after a student is hired, they are tested several times and spot checked before they are cleared to shelve books independently without revision. A mis-shelved book may be lost for years before it is found again.

Applications are carefully scrutinized. The library looks to match skills that applicants possess with skills stated in the job description. The lack of prior work experience is not held against the applicant provided they have had involvement in community organizations or have done extensive community service. Freshman, sophomore, and junior applications carry more weight than those of a student who is about to graduate. In addition, there are several red flags that automatically place applications in the reject pile. They include illegible handwriting, misspellings, improper grammar, and listing hanging out with friends as a hobby. A resume is appreciated but not mandatory. Generally, from four to six interviews are granted depending on how many positions are open. In the 2011/2012 academic year, the library plans to hire twice as many work-study students as it has in the past. Since we have two returning work-study students, the pool will remain the same. If a suitable candidate cannot be found from the applicants, the library will keep the position open until a suitable candidate appears. It is better to find the right person for the job than to train the wrong person and have to let them go. Once the work-study students are hired, the training process begins.

All work-study students are trained to perform the same tasks. All hours spent training, whether face-to-face or by tutorial, are paid for at the

current work-study rate. For the first week, work-study students train at their own pace. Training continues into the second week while shadowing a full-time employee. Training tutorials were created in two different formats: voice over PowerPoint presentations and demonstration video clips made using the free screen capture software, CamStudio. The voice-over PowerPoint presentations are used for policies and procedures not related to the computer. Each PowerPoint presentation has a corresponding quiz with multiple choice radio buttons that is made available as a PDF file. (Appendix C includes a sample quiz.) Students print a copy of the quiz and take it with paper and pencil. The quiz is for personal assessment and is used to point students to areas that they may need to review. Procedures that demonstrate the use of the computer-based ILS, Horizon, are demonstrated by videos that were created with a click-by-click screen capture software program with voice narration to explain the processes involved.

The three voice-over PowerPoint presentations cover: Borrowing Policy, Computer Use Policy, and Opening and Closing Procedures. Topics covered in the Borrowing Policy tutorial include borrower types as well as circulation periods, renewals, and identification required for check-out. The computer use policy section covers guest use of computers.

These tutorials were designed for students to receive the information through both visual and auditory learning. Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009) explain the three main psychological theories behind learning: behaviorism, constructionism, and humanism. These tutorials, as well as the on the job training that follows, have been constructed using principles from both behaviorism and humanism. Behaviorist principles and practices draw heavily upon active participation. During their first week on the job, a circulation staff member shadows the student while allowing the student to become an active participant in their training. Humanistic principles and practices rely heavily upon learner-centered teaching and self efficacy. By viewing training tutorials, student workers are able to learn at their own pace with the trainer acting as coach rather than teacher (47). Grassian and Kaplowitz also explain that by incorporating different learning techniques into training sessions, we increase the probability of reaching different types of learners (45).

The video clips for the tutorials are relatively short, under five minutes; and they demonstrate how to use the ILS, Horizon. The clips are so short in order to allow a student to review the material in a relatively

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brief period of time. In addition, studies have shown that students are able to retain more information when it is introduced in smaller amounts. Cooper (1998) explains how cognitive load theory can be used to help students process information for maximum retention. When students are introduced to materials in smaller chunks and have breaks in between, they are able to retain more information. One video clip demonstrates basic check-in, check-out, adding new patrons, and renewal procedures. Other video demonstrations address adding barcodes, deleting borrowers, running fine notices, and MichCard borrowers.

After a student has viewed all the training tutorials, on-the-job training begins. As a general rule, the same circulation staff employee trains each work-study student individually and demonstrates all the procedures. The student actively participates in this process. When a situation arises that was covered in training, the work-study student has the opportunity to provide service for patrons with the circulation staff employee present to assist if needed. The library uses a Student Assistant Training Checklist, whose purpose is to demonstrate that everything has been covered. (See Appendix B for the "Training Checklist." For the first week that work-study students are scheduled, they will work with another circulation employee so that they are able to get comfortable with desk duties while still having a backup present. By the time work-study students are scheduled on the desk alone, they have been introduced to most situations. In the event of a problem, a full-time circulation staff member is always available in the backroom.

Results

Although we have used this hiring and training method for only one fiscal year, Marygrove Library feels that it has been successful. The two work-study students hired using this process have been asked to return in the fall. In fact, the training program is so successful that there will be two additional work-study employees hired this year for a total of four. In past years, we did not have the manpower to train four work-study students. In addition, work-study students were seldom asked to return. Most were let go because of their frequent need for retraining. Allowing students to train at their own pace and review tutorials when needed has saved the circulation staff hours of having to retrain work-study students. With this new process, after a certain point, students are responsible for their own learning.

An unexpected outcome of this project was the opportunity to review and update the *Circulation Manual*. Consistent policy, very important in the library, is always an issue. The information used to make these tutorials was taken directly from the *Circulation Manual*. Much of the information was outdated and needed to be updated. As a result, the making of training tutorials served a dual purpose: making the actual tutorials and updating the *Circulation Manual*.

Conclusion

In response to a shrinking library workforce, libraries are forced to explore alternative staffing solutions. Traditionally hiring work-study employees has posed myriad problems. Faced with the options of reducing hours or reducing services due to staffing shortfalls, Marygrove Library chose to redesign their work-study hiring and training practices to take advantage of an underutilized source of labor. While this program is still in its infancy, significant positive results have already occurred. For the first time in many years, Marygrove Library will welcome back returning work-study students.

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Appendix A

Work Study Job Description: Marygrove College

Position: Two Library Work Study Positions Available

Reports To: Laura Manley, Library Assistant, Circulation Services

Hours: 10 Hours per week, including nights and weekends

Description: Under the general direction of the head of Circulation, the library assistant delivers timely, professional, competent, and client-friendly services to ensure efficient and effective circulation control over, and user access to, all formats of well-organized print and non-print resources in the collection.

Minimum Qualifications:

MUST HAVE BEEN AWARDED WORK STUDY FUNDS

- Must have a 3.0 grade point average or better
- Strong interpersonal skills and technology skills
- Ability to multi-task
- Strong attention to detail
- Flexible and reliable
- Must be able to work in a fast paced environment
- Must possess professional demeanor
- Accuracy with number and numerical sequences
- Ability to use a multi-line phone system
- Basic knowledge of the Dewey Decimal Classification System
- Must be able to work nights and weekends

Responsibilities:

- Staff circulation desk
- Enter new patron records
- Check-in and check-out library materials
- Respond to student, staff, and faculty general queries

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- Stack maintenance
- Help students, staff, and faculty with printing, copying, and faxing system
- Trouble shoot technology
- Answer and maneuver multi-phone system
- Open and Close library as needed

To Apply: Applications are available at the library Circulation Desk. Please Upon completion return to Laura Manley, Library Assistant.

Appendix B

Student Assistant Training Checklist

Student's Name _____

General Tasks

1. _____ How to take in money: cash drawer, laser print copy, receipts, and CD sales.
2. _____ Telephone: location of phone numbers, taking messages, answering and transferring phone calls
3. _____ Mail pick-up: lost and found, employee mailbox
4. _____ Newspapers: how to record, maintenance of newspapers
5. _____ Photocopiers: loading paper
6. _____ Customer Satisfaction surveys
7. _____ Daily work list
8. _____ Microsoft Outlook calendar: how to read room reservations

Library Books

1. _____ Hold shelf: what goes there, forms used
2. _____ Damaged books: problem shelf
3. _____ Procedure for missing books: book search forms
4. _____ Book sweeps and pick-ups from the 1st -4th floors
 - a. How to reshelv
 - b. Shelf reading
 - c. Book maintenance
 - d. Call # training
5. _____ Checking out Reserves and Videos

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Horizons Functions

1. _____ Procedures for entering new patrons
2. _____ Checking items in or out, desensitizing
3. _____ Fines
4. _____ Handling non-Marygrove borrowers (IHMs, MichiCard, consortium)

A.V. Equipment

1. _____ Computer maintenance and cleaning
2. _____ TV/VCR cleaning
3. _____ Photocopier glass cleaning, card reader cleaning

Appendix C

Sample Student Quiz

Borrowers Policy Quiz

1. What library privileges are extended to MichiCard holders?

- ☐ They may check out print materials only.
- ☐ They may use Marygrove Library computers.
- ☐ They can check out DVD's.
- ☐ All of the above

2. Who can borrow materials from Marygrove Library?

- ☐ Students, faculty and staff
- ☐ InfoPass holders and MichCard borrowers
- ☐ Consortium borrowers
- ☐ All of the above

3. Which school is not a listed as a being part of the Consortium family?

- ☐ Madonna University
- ☐ University of Detroit
- ☐ Center for the Creative Studies (CCS)
- ☐ Sacred Heart Major Seminary

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4. What type of identification is needed for students to check out materials?

- ☐ Drivers license
- ☐ Marygrove ID w/ current year sticker
- ☐ No identification is needed (honor system)
- ☐ Drivers license or Marygrove ID w/ current year sticker

5. What type of identification do alumni need to check out materials?

- ☐ Proof of graduation
- ☐ Drivers license
- ☐ Marygrove ID
- ☐ All of the above

6. What type of identification is needed for IHM sisters check out materials?

- ☐ Drivers license
- ☐ None
- ☐ Marygrove ID
- ☐ IHM identification card

7. What type of identification is needed for staff and faculty to check out materials?

- ☐ Drivers license
- ☐ Current College ID
- ☐ No identification
- ☐ MichCard sticker

8. How long can Reference items and periodicals be checked out for?

- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ One week
- ☐ All semester
- ☐ As long as students need the materials

9. What is the checkout period for books?

- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ One week
- ☐ All semester
- ☐ As long as students need the materials

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10. How long can students check out audio visual material for?

- ☐ Three hours for use in the library only
- ☐ One week
- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ As long as needed

11. How long can faculty and staff check out audio visual materials for?

- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ One week
- ☐ All semester
- ☐ As long as they need them

12. How long is the check out period for faculty and staff?

- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ One week
- ☐ All semester
- ☐ As long as they need the materials

13. What is the checkout period for reserve items?

- ☐ One hour
- ☐ Three hours
- ☐ One day
- ☐ It varies depending on the item

14. Where are reserve items kept?

- ☐ Reference Room
- ☐ Stacks
- ☐ Behind the circulation desk
- ☐ In the student support center

15. How many times can an item be renewed?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 1
- ☐ Never