

Access the Web – Training Student Library Assistants by June L. Power, M.L.I.S.

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Where would libraries be without student workers? More than likely, they would find themselves in a difficult situation. Especially in this age of shrinking staff and budgets, many libraries would be hard put to get by without the assistance of student workers and other temporary employees. However, the very fact that they are temporary leads to issues of training, evaluation, and turnover. In working with students over the years, I have learned a few things about these areas – namely the need for planning, consistency, and follow-up. While this article mainly has an academic focus on student assistants, the same information is applicable to other temporary employees, such as public library volunteers. I am a big believer in not reinventing the wheel, so I used many of the sites below to guide me through my revamping of training materials, which I am more than happy to share with any interested individuals. I hope that they will do the same for you – as the borrowing of ideas is one of the great reasons libraries exist.

One interesting note about my research is that while there were many great websites with information regarding library student assistants, what was available was often very institution-specific, and there was very little on other temporary employees. There is definitely room for more information *in general* on training temporary employees, including students. Another observation is that while there is a great deal of information on hiring and evaluations, there is very little on reward systems used for recognizing the efforts of student assistants and other temporary employees.

For those of you with a vested interest in this topic, you may want to take a look at Kimberly Sweetman's [Managing Student Assistants: a How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians](#) (Neal-Schuman, 2006) in which was included my "Sample Student Worker Handbook."

Houston Cole Library Student Assistant Handbook

<http://www.jsu.edu/dept/library/graphic/stuhand.htm>

This online handbook covers the basic information any student working in the library would need to know – information about the library and the jobs student assistants may perform, hiring, evaluation, disciplinary action, and training. The training section includes a checklist -a useful tool for providing consistent training. My favorite part of the website is the posttest – a useful tool for evaluating the effectiveness of your training program. Developing a training program is important, but evaluation of your program is the key to increasing its effectiveness.

University of Louisville Libraries Student Assistant Training Program

<http://www.louisville.edu/library/training/>

What I like especially about this site is its usefulness for both students and student supervisors. Supervisors are provided with information about human resources issues, the role of student workers, and student worker training and evaluation materials. Checklists are a major feature of the training materials. The student side of the site includes, among other things, a handbook, evaluation materials, training exercises, and a PowerPoint about patron service. There is a useful exercise on referring reference questions, which includes a convenient flowchart. I really like this flow-chart, as it never seems that students can learn the difference between a directional and a reference question, and I hope this will be a tool to help my student workers clear that stumbling block.

Oberlin College Library

<http://www.oberlin.edu/library/servninfo/studentassistants/>

Two main sections comprise this website: general employment guidelines and basic skills and online training – including shelving and book handling. An interesting touch, not seen on many other sites, was a message from the library director to new student assistants. I believe this demonstrates the value of student assistants to the organization. There are several unique and interesting features of this website. The first is the table that explains the differences between different call number systems – LC, Dewey, and SuDoc – a wonderful overview for student assistants who may only have familiarity with Dewey Decimal Classification. The second is the excellent PowerPoint on handling books that was produced by the Library of Congress based on a video from 1984, but that was updated by Oberlin College for use in its training program. I love this presentation, and have used it often, always hoping that the Library of Congress will release an updated version.

South Alabama University Library's Training Program for Student Assistants

<http://library.southalabama.edu/training/>

The training homepage includes application information, an introduction to working at the library, student guidelines, basic library information, guidelines on how to find information and how to work with the public, and performance evaluation information. South Alabama University shares with Oberlin College the inclusion of a message from the Dean of Libraries to student assistants. All the forms used for student workers are available online – a useful feature for both students and staff. An extensive glossary of library terminology is included on the website, as is a thorough breakdown of LC classification. The Finding Articles tutorial was very convenient and short enough to retain the attention span of a student, besides being well organized in a step-by-step format. I also am enamored of the FAQ – haven't we all heard those same questions over and over again?

University of Iowa Libraries Student Assistant Training

<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/ref/training/index.html>

The website is divided into an introduction to the library, information about student employment, training materials, and government documents classification exercises – which those of you training students for work in government documents may find useful to peruse. The introduction section includes a useful FAQ – which mainly consists of links to the places on the library website where those answers may be found. I like this approach, as it leads the students to become more familiar with the library than they would just reading a list of questions and answers.

USC Document Repository

<http://dotsx.usc.edu/repository/>

Several documents listed are useful in training student workers, but you must look for them in the list of non-relevant documents – the documents meant to aid university students in using the library's resources. The guide Call Numbers: Library of Congress Subject Classification helps to explain the relationship between call numbers and subjects. The library's circulation forms are available here, as well as a Glossary of Basic Library Terms, and the Student Assistant Manual. All of the materials are organized, into a single table of contents.

Student Employment in the BU Libraries

<http://library.lib.binghamton.edu/webdocs/studentemploy.html>

Birmingham University Libraries gives only the basic information for student assistants on their website – which positions are currently available with the job overview, duties, required skills, and hours listed for each. Links to online applications are included with each job description. While the site itself is just not designed to be a useful training tool, the job specific information would be very useful for a student looking for a job at the library, and so can serve as a sort of model for the information to include when marketing your available library positions.

Meet the Library Student Workers

<http://www.siprep.org/wilsey/MeettheLibraryStudentWorkers.cfm>

This is a very cool website! While, as the BU Libraries website mentioned above, the website gives no information on how to train your student workers, it does provide an excellent example of how to motivate, reward, and showcase your student assistants. Each student's picture is included on the website, with his or her name and graduating year. Under each picture are listed each student's favorite books and activities. This is a great way for people inside your organization, as well as patrons to get to know your student workers, not to mention making your student assistants or temporary workers feel appreciated and valued. This would be an excellent component to add to a training program.

Library Student Assistant Handbook: Or, everything you want to know while working at the circulation desk

<http://www.library.piercelaw.edu/pubs/Librarystudenthandbook.htm>

The amusing title sucked me right in to this handbook developed by the Franklin Pierce Law Center Library, where my eyes immediately were bombarded by color and other poor visual components. The hyperlinked table of contents is arranged alphabetically – which makes it easy and convenient for students to use when they need to find information on a particular topic. The manual, however, is arranged topically so that the content flows rather than jumping from subject to subject. Importantly includes a detailed map of each floor of the library – which can be a very useful tool, especially for student workers who are also new to the institution and may not be familiar with the library. The best part of the site, in my opinion, was the section on how to deal with difficult patrons. I find this useful not only for student assistants, but for staff in general.

Maximizing Contributions of Branch Library Student Assistants to the Library System – Music Library Association Annual Conference Poster Session

<http://www2.andrews.edu/~mack/students.html>

Presenter Linda Mack of the Music Materials Center (MMC) of James White Library at Andrews University provides in this poster session a description of how at the MMC, “students assistants' slow time is organized to assist in [library projects]. Student assistants are assigned to increasingly complex tasks commensurate with their experience...” The contents included listings for staff information, library information, slow time projects, training documents, department policies and procedures, a bibliography, the student employee handbook, and a pathfinder for reference training. Seeing this, I got excited thinking I had found a wealth of information, but was disappointed upon review of the actual content. Frankly, I was expecting more. There seemed to be the usual training/student employee information, but very little discussion of slow time projects, organization of student assistant time, and how to balance projects with daily job duties – the topics I was most interested in finding information on and which I did not discover were covered in any other.