

Designing the "IT Degree" for Student Employees

Lisa Brown
University of Rochester
Academic Technology Services
Taylor Hall, Box 270196
Rochester, NY 14627
716-275-9162
Lita@ats.rochester.edu

Janak Gada
University of Rochester
Academic Technology Services
Taylor Hall, Box 270196
Rochester, NY 14627
716-275-6549
Jkga@ats.rochester.edu

Abstract

Academic Technology Services at the University of Rochester is in the process of revamping its student staff training program. This is in an effort to provide top-notch customer service and support and promote a continuous growth opportunity for student employees.

The future plan for Academic Technology Services student staff training at the University of Rochester is to develop a set of training modules in a variety of technology areas. Employment paths will be developed that are guided by the completion of a series of training modules in designated areas of expertise. After completing a core set of skills, student employees will have the opportunity to select a specialization track. This training program is also part of a larger reorganization of the student staffing system where four levels of consultants will be created in each functional area of ATS based on completion of the skill sets deemed important for successful employment in each level.

Keywords

Training, Student Employees

1. Background

In the past, training was provided to student staff on a regular basis; however, very little was retained, and the most appropriate skills were not always being taught. Additionally, the same material was typically repeated every year, and returning staff members had very little motivation to attend training.

The old training program consisted of a weekend long "boot-camp" at the beginning of the school year--Annual Personnel Training--followed by weekly training sessions during the Fall semester and biweekly training sessions during Spring semester. Each year, student Training Coordinators would develop the sessions that they felt were necessary to train the student staff. Returning student employees were not always taken into consideration in the plans and typically the same introductory material would be offered year after year in order to provide new hires with the appropriate skills to function in their jobs.

2. Why Change?

Not too long ago, the student staffing system within the computing organization consisted of two types of positions: students that worked in the public labs and a limited number of more advanced students that assisted full-time consulting staff--technical assistants. Training was not required for technical assistants and typically, the students working in the public labs needed repeated training in some basic skills to keep abreast of the technology.

Academic Technology Services now consists of a number of different functional areas. All require student employees to know about technology, but the levels of knowledge required vary greatly, as does the focus of skills. Student employee positions within ATS consist of positions working in public labs, Computer Sales and Service, Classroom Technology Services, Information Center, web development group, and Educational Technology Center. Students working in the public labs require a very different skill set and level of expertise than those working in Computer Sales or Classroom Technology Services. Some areas, like the web development group, Information Center and the Educational Technology Center, need to have trained employees from areas like the public labs to hire into their groups when positions become available.

It had become increasingly difficult to find more advanced students to fill these types of positions. Specialized areas were not able to hire directly from the current student employees without a lot of additional training. It became apparent that the old training program was not fulfilling the current needs of the organization.

Additionally, student employees were becoming indifferent about attending training sessions. Even though training was mandatory, many students would not attend because the session was very similar to a session they had attended in previous years. There was no new information being offered to the student employees. Student employees were not being offered the opportunity to expand their skills and prepare for the advanced positions in the specialized areas of the organization. Instead, they were looking elsewhere for challenging employment.

3. The New Student Staff System

The first step in fixing some of the problems in the student employment system was to look at the existing structure. With just two levels of employment, there were no real opportunities for student employees to grow unless their skills were very advanced. This was modified into a tiered system of positions;

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four consulting levels based on skills and experience. Specialized areas could choose to only hire student employees at specific skill levels, however there would be tiers within most of the different organizational groups. This would provide students with an incentive to learn more and advance through the system.

In order to facilitate the tiered system, there needed to be a way to decide what skills were required for each level and to determine when a student employee had reached that level. This led to the creation of the new training program.

4. The New Training Program

The training program will consist of a set of training modules focused on specific skills. A series of modules focusing on core skills will provide new hires with the appropriate background to work in an entry-level position. Specialization tracks will offer them the opportunity to learn skills that will be required for a number of higher level positions throughout the organization. Additionally, student employees will continue to learn new skills as they progress through different levels of employment within a specialized area, or take positions in different areas of Academic Technology Services.

This new training program is a way to provide the broader set of core skills to the new hires -- making them proficient in their jobs and providing them with a basis of expertise on which to build skills for more advanced and specialized areas. The core set of skills for all student employees within Academic Technology Services is outlined in Table 1.

Some additional training in specific procedures will be required for beginning consultants working in Classroom Technology Services (delivery and setup of equipment in classroom settings), as well as in the Computer Sales and Service area.

Once a student has completed all of the modules associated with the core set of skills and demonstrated competency, they can begin to focus on specialized skills geared toward particular areas of interest with the intent of working in a specific area of ATS. They can continue to learn additional software and advance through levels of employment in the public labs, or they can diversify their skills and take jobs in various areas of ATS by mixing and matching modules required in those areas and passing the associated tests.

If a student employee wishes to work in a specialized area of ATS, they will need to complete the modules required for that

Software	Professional Development
Beginning Word	Communication Skills
Beginning Excel	Customer Service Skills
FTP	Troubleshooting
Basic Macintosh OS	Internal Resources
Basic Windows OS	Machine Setup
Basic UNIX	Working with Others
Minitab	Opening/Closing Procedures
Netscape/Internet Explorer	Organizational Skills
Pine/Elm	Reliability
Telnet	Telephone Consulting

area before applying for the position. There is no guarantee of a position simply because a student has passed the modules however. There must be a vacancy in the position, and the student must apply and interview for that position with the Area Manager and associated full-time staff. The skills required of student employees before they can apply for a specialized position are outlined in Table 2.

Once hired into a specialized area, student employees will continue to be trained and further develop their skills in that area of expertise. Training modules will be available that focus on the advanced skills needed to succeed and advance in that area. Table 3 lists a sample of the modules required for advancement within a specialized area of employment.

5. Method

A full-time staff member will now oversee the new training program. Three student employees, hired as Training Coordinators, will work closely with the full-time staff member and develop the necessary modules and tracks needed by each area to serve the customers. The full-time staff member will also be the liaison between the student staff and the full-time staff of ATS to further facilitate involvement and cooperation on both sides. He will work with each Area Manager to successfully implement the training sessions, gather feedback from the

Information Center	Educational Technology Center	Web Development Group
Beginning PowerPoint	Beginning PowerPoint	Basic HTML
Intermediate Mac OS	Beginning Photoshop	Beginning Photoshop
Intermediate Windows OS	Basic Scanning	Beginning Netscape Composer
Intermediate UNIX	Beginning Netscape Composer	
Basic HTML	Basic HTML	
	Search Engines	

students, and constantly update the program.

The role of the Area Managers in the training program will be to communicate clearly with the student Training Coordinators their needs for staff training. Also, the Area Managers will be asked for support in recruiting their full-time staff members to provide the instruction on specialized topics. This has been a problem in the past because often the Training Coordinators did not provide enough notice to the full-time staff that they may need assistance. It should no longer be difficult to obtain the staff's cooperation because the program will be laid out well in advance and classes will not be scheduled last minute.

The role of the student Training Coordinators will also change. The number of these students will be increased from two to three to handle the growth of the student employee size. Their primary role will also shift from instructing lab consultants on

rudimentary material to coordinating training for all levels of employees. The full-time staff member in charge of training will closely supervise them to ensure that the needs of the student employees and the various areas of ATS are being met. They will also gather feedback from both sides and implement changes in the program where they may find it necessary.

The final piece of the training puzzle that will fit into place is for the full-time training supervisor to work closely with the full-time student administrator to enforce the program. The full-time administrator of students maintains a file on each employee and track the progress of each student in the program. In addition, he will be able to reprimand student employees who fail to comply with the requirements of the training program. This includes both attendance and performance from each student. The student staff administrator will deal accordingly with those who fail to meet minimum standards in the course of their employment.

Table 3 - Modules Available for Advancement in Different Areas

Information Center

Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
The Information Center begins hiring	Intermediate Macintosh OS	Advanced Browsers
At Level 3 Consultants	Intermediate Windows OS	Documentation Development
	Basic UNIX	Advanced OS Troubleshooting
	Intermediate Office Suite	Printer Setup / Troubleshooting
	Intermediate Browsers	Advanced Customer Service
	Eudora Lite/Pro	Independence

Educational Technology Center

Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Intermediate PowerPoint	Advanced Powerpoint	Beginning Director
Documentation Development	Intermediate Dreamweaver/GoLive	Intermediate Fireworks
Beginning Dreamweaver/GoLive	Advanced Photoshop	Beginning FLASH
Intermediate Photoshop	Beginning Fireworks	Beginning Bryce
Intermediate Netscape Composer	Beginning Illustrator	Intermediate PageMaker/InDesign
	Beginning PageMaker/InDesign	Beginning Authorware

Web Development Group

Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Intermediate Netscape Composer	Beginning Dreamweaver/GoLive	Mysql database
Digital Camera Use	Beginning FrontPage	Intermediate Dreamweaver/GoLive
Basic Unix	Beginning PageMaker/InDesign	Intermediate FrontPage
Intermediate HTML	Beginning Illustrator	Unix programming, Perl, Java
	Intermediate Unix	Intermediate Illustrator