

# Developing and Implementing a Comprehensive Training and Incentive Program for Student Employees in Information Technology

Jim Osborn  
University of Wyoming  
Ivinson Bldg, Rm. 135  
Laramie, WY 82071  
(307) 766-2939  
JimOsbrn@uwyo.edu

## ABSTRACT

Anyone who works with student employees knows that while it is often difficult to train sufficiently, it is of the utmost importance to have a qualified, knowledgeable staff. We will discuss the process needed to develop and implement a comprehensive training and incentive program for student workers, based on the experiences we've had at the University of Wyoming.

We will begin by identifying the skills of those students we consider to be outstanding employees. We'll talk about which skills can be easily taught and which a student should possess before we hire them. We'll examine the demographics of our work force and why we must remember we're dealing with students when designing a training and incentive program.

We will talk about integrating hiring, training, and incentives into one cohesive program in the hopes of increasing employee retention and the building of a solid knowledge base. We'll also look at who to search for during the interview process and how to develop an in-depth orientation for new employees that maximizes the student's ability to perform in a real-life environment with the least amount of training. Since training is something that must be on-going, we will also look at how to develop a long-term training program that incorporates different types of training, such as instructor-led, self-paced, and simulated experiential (role-playing) models.

We'll discuss the importance of a tracking system to monitor the progress and incentives of the students. We'll look at how you can make the students want to improve their skill sets, even if they're not technology-related majors. We'll also talk about increasingly important shortcuts, like how to get other people at your university to help train so you're not doing it alone. We can't forget the need for the program to fit university policies and paperwork processes. We'll also talk about some of the

simple tools you can use to supplement the training and incentive model, making it more efficient and successful...and even student driven!

## Keywords

Training, incentives, student employees, retention.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Working with student employees can be a very rewarding yet frustrating experience. They often have seemingly unlimited reserves of energy and potential. However, they are often not willing to expend either of these things at work. Tapping into these reserves is the challenge that so many of us face when hiring and training students.

## 2. OUR ENVIRONMENT

So that you can better understand our training model, it might be helpful to give you the basic information about our structure and where student employees fit into it. Information Technology at the University of Wyoming has 12 computer labs staffed by approximately 80 student employees. There are 4 full-time staff members and 6 student technicians, who support around 700 computers on a Windows 2000 lab system. We have 38 software packages on our standard lab build. We have around 80 specialized software packages that are located in specific labs, with about 23 of those located in staffed labs.

## 3. EMPLOYEE SKILLS

### 3.1 Examining Outstanding Employees

When we first decided to redesign our training and incentive program, we realized that the simplest thing to do was look at our current employees and decide what skills and abilities our best students possessed. Then we could decide how to transfer these skills to all current and incoming employees. We realized that these skill sets can be divided into two categories: those that can be taught and those that can't.

### 3.2 Skills That Can Be Taught

Technical skills and knowledge are things that our lab assistants need to have in order to do their job, just as any student employee. Over the years we have realized that technical skills and knowledge is something that can easily be taught. Anyone is

capable of rote memorization. “When you see this error message, follow these 3 steps to correct the problem.”

Knowledge of specific programs can also be taught. Someone who has used a word processing program like Microsoft Works or Word Perfect can quickly pick up the specifics of Word. Even someone who has never worked with a database can be taught the basics of Access.

We also expect our lab assistants to do basic troubleshooting. They must be able to determine if a problem exists with the machine, with the software in general, or with a single customer’s account. We find it simple enough to teach this skill. One thing that helps is giving the students scripts or examples of basic questions and guidelines. “Log into the same machine with a different account and do the same thing. Does the same error occur? Now log into a different machine. Does the problem still occur? If yes, it means the problem is with...” Again, it is a simple sequence that anyone can follow. We do not expect the student employees to fix a problem with a machine, but they are expected to report it. This way the technicians have an idea of what they’re facing when they go out to fix the problem.

### **3.3 Skills That Cannot Be Taught**

We also identified many skills that cannot be effectively taught to student employees who are already college-aged. Patience and people skills are not something you can easily teach an employee. They may develop these traits over time, but typically by the time someone is a freshman in college, they either have them or they don’t. We can teach techniques or tricks to help employees to deal with difficult people, but when it comes down to it, the employees either have the ability to remain patient when dealing with critical and irate customers or they don’t. Learning to control one’s temper is something that takes years of work and isn’t something we have the time or ability to teach a student worker.

Responsibility is also not something we can teach student employees. We expect our Lab Assistants to be responsible for their shifts. It is up to them to find replacements for their shifts when they must be gone. We cannot teach them this vital skill. It must be ingrained in them long before they come to us seeking a job.

Another skill we find very useful in our Lab Assistants is the ability to explain something very technical in very easy to follow, simplified terms. Our employees are usually more technically advanced than the average student. When explaining to a customer how they can solve a problem, they must be able to do so in terms and language that the client can understand. This is also something that is very difficult to teach an employee. We can offer a few tips and suggestions, but it involves being able to think creatively and come up with working analogies. It takes a great deal of time to teach this skill, and is therefore something we cannot afford to focus on in training.

## **4. DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENT EMPLOYEES**

It is very important to remember one thing about student employees: they are, first and foremost, students. The fact they are students means that they have special needs and requirements. While these needs seem simple and obvious when reading them,

all too often as supervisors we forget about these needs, focusing on the fact that they work for us and are therefore employees. However, their number one focus is school. They work because they need money. They are at your university to earn a degree and their job is secondary. This means that they need time to study. They cannot go to school and work all of the time. Students take classes and therefore cannot work a typical 8-5 job. They need flexible works hours that fit around their course load.

Since you don’t have to study computers to be proficient with them, we find that a large percentage of our student employees are studying in fields outside Computer Science or the computer industry. Bear in mind that not all of your students are Computer Science majors who know how to program.

Student employees are also at your university for a limited period of time. This means a high attrition rate each year. If you hire only juniors and seniors, you will have to hire more people each year. Also remember that for many of these students, it’s their first time away from home and out from under their parents’ wings. They still need firm policies and guidance. Though many students hold down jobs before they get to college, they don’t often hold positions of real responsibility. They are used to being under constant supervision. If your environment doesn’t allow for this, as ours doesn’t, make sure that your policies and expectations are very clearly defined and easy to reference later on.

## **5. WHO TO LOOK FOR IN INTERVIEWS**

We have identified the skills we want a student employee to have and discussed the fact that some of these skills cannot be (easily) taught. It only makes sense to watch for these skills during an interview and hire based on these, rather than technical proficiency. We always expect a person to be familiar and comfortable with computers, but find this one of the least important characteristics we look for. Right now one of our best employees is a theatre major; when she first started with us she needed help formatting her résumé in Word. We now staff her in our most difficult labs.

We always look for people who are willing to work hands-on with clients. We’ve found that when a customer needs help, they prefer someone who will leave the desk and come to look at their screen. It feels more personal to them and as anyone who has tried to provide phone support knows, it’s easier to fix a problem when you can look at the customer’s screen. We understand that in some of our larger and busier labs a student employee may have to hand the client a “How To” sheet and say “Here’s how to do that; if you have any problems with that come find me again.” With limited staffing budgets, it’s inevitable. But hiring someone who’s willing to go the extra mile from the start helps a great deal.

We also look for people who are self-monitoring and have an interest in advancement. Don’t be afraid to hire a student who says “I want this job so I can learn more about computers.” This person will probably work harder to learn the answers than someone who only wants a paycheck.

People who have previous experience with customer service are also good to watch for, even if their experience comes from being a burger flipper at the local fast food joint. They’ve

probably had to deal with upset people, and that's valuable practice.

We also look for people who can simplify things in a clear and concise manner. Taking something technical and breaking it down for a low-end client is not simple, and someone who can think quickly and phrase things in many different ways will help clients more than someone who has a mountain of technical knowledge but can't explain details in layman's terms. It's important to look for student employees who realize not everyone uses computers and not everyone is good with them.

We also hire with an eye to the future. We look for younger students or those who will be at our school for more than one year. Incoming grad students and freshmen are good candidates. If you hire one of these people, you can train them and have them on staff for several years, rather than the one year you'd have when hiring a senior. Also be on the lookout for people you think might have potential for positions of higher responsibility and authority. We have student technicians, who help around the office and do physical repairs on equipment. When we interview, we watch for people who would make good techs. Then we groom them while they are lab assistants, staffing them in harder labs and giving them extra tasks now and then. It's important to think about more than immediate needs when hiring. Think long term.

## **6. ORIENTATION TRAININGS**

Since we hire new lab assistants based more on people skills and ability to learn quickly than technical knowledge, we have to provide some kind of training for students before sending them out to the wolves. We often refer to this as the "Crash Course."

### **6.1 Minimum Time**

We usually have very little time to train new student employees. Many students don't return to town until the day before classes start. Some simply can't because of leases or dates when the dorms open. Many work jobs over the break and are expected to work right up until classes start. Also, the beginning of a semester is a very hectic time, and full-time staff are needed for things other than training. We have to pack in as much training as we can into a small amount of time. We need these students in labs now, not after two weeks of thorough training. In order to give ourselves a little bit more time, we stagger the opening of our labs so that we can hire even after classes have started. We are training our new students even a few weeks into school and have found that an intensive, one-shot session is necessary. We wish that we could take a whole week and train them a little bit each day or even all day long for an entire week, but we don't have the luxury of time for extensive training.

### **6.2 Maximum Abilities**

Since we pack our trainings to the brim with info, we have to stick to the basics. We cover rules and policies first. We set expectations and quickly dispense with tedious things like dress code and doing homework while on duty.

We let the lab assistants know what rules they must follow and also what rules they enforce. We have a set list of policies and rules that customers agree to when they create an account. All of our policies are designed to support one thing: an

environment suitable to academic work. We point this out to our student employees and show them how the rules they enforce all point to this end.

Next we cover the basic functions of the job. Things like time cards, how to handle the cash box and deposit books, how to request a sub when they need time off, how to handle emergencies, etc.

Perhaps the most important thing we do in training is showing the students how and where to look up information for themselves. Most of these employees will be working in remote labs with little or no direct supervision. They can't always run down the hall to ask a question or get clarification from a supervisor. They need to be able to find information on their own and function autonomously. Later in this paper we will discuss some of the tools we use to make this easier on student and supervisor alike.

We also train on some specific tasks. We cover the most important and common problems they will face in the labs and use these as examples, always remembering to show them where they can look up the information later if they don't remember it. We go over printers, printer queues, storage quota, profile quota, corrupt profiles, and other very common and easily solved situations.

We also deal with more vague things like how to troubleshoot a problem and determine where exactly the problem exists. We give them clear processes and steps that they can refer to pinpoint the source of a problem. They might not be able to find the exact cause, but if they can narrow it down to the machine, they can move the customer to another computer. If they determine it's a problem with their client's account, they can delete the profile and start the client off fresh. We also teach them how to report problems to us when it's something they can't deal with or solve.

### **6.3 Multiple Media Forms**

Educational theory tells us that different people learn in different ways. Some people learn best from reading, some from watching, some from hearing, and some from doing. This makes it very important for you to use different types of media when training your new employees. Make sure to have printed copies of things, even if they are just summaries. Some people work best with hard copy. Everything we do is in an online format, as we are trying to become a paperless office. This also means that our employees can use our reference sources from anywhere without having to drag around a thick employee manual. Despite our efforts to move away from paper, we have to make some concessions here. Some people simply learn best when they have printed material in front of them. Since having paper copies works best for some, we have a condensed version that is printed out and available for those who request them. It's important to provide resources to employees in many formats so they can use the one that works best for them.

Make sure that when you train someone, you're being very verbal. While lecture can be boring, it's also important for some. Repeating very important things several times is a very good idea, even if you sound like a broken record. Repetition makes us much more likely to retain the knowledge long-term. We've found it helpful to have a printed manual while the instructor reads and discusses things using a projector. The

trainees can see what the instructor is talking about right on the webpage, watching him or her do it in real time. At the same time, they can follow along and, as many students are often want to do, take notes in the book.

We also give our student employees a laminated card containing phone numbers. It has office numbers, home numbers, and pager numbers for the four full-time staff. We don't necessarily like getting calls at home on evenings and weekends, but we understand that since our employees are students and are working late hours, they need somewhere to turn for support. Situations can arise; in the past, lab assistants have had to call us at home because of medical emergencies in the labs, having to call the police, or because they can't get into a building because it's locked. Our feeling is that we'd rather be disturbed on the weekend than walk into work on Monday to find out one of our labs burned down. The cards also contain web addresses for the online resources and tools and email addresses. This way if someone is out of town and their car breaks down, they can call or email us in time to find a replacement for their shift. This is better than having an unstaffed lab.

## **7. TOOLS TO AID AND SUPPLEMENT TRAINING**

Since we can only offer the very basics in the initial training orientation, we think it's very important to have good tools for student employees to use.

### **7.1 Web Pages**

We have made a concerted effort to put all of our information online in the form of web pages. All policies and procedures are listed in detail on these pages. Any "How To" documents or instruction sheets are available online as well. Any documents that the student employees might need or use, such as time card templates, blank pages for the deposit book, or morning call in sheets are posted. This way, if a lab runs out of a document, it can be printed off easily from any location. Since we have some confidential information (such as home phone numbers, door combinations, etc.) on the web pages, we have secured them so that our employees must log into the pages.

Our systems administrators have also designed a web page that allows our lab assistants to perform some administrative tasks while limiting their access to others. From this webpage they can delete a customer's profile, manage print queues, check to see if someone has an account, delete a customer's history folder, scan a customer's quota, or unlock an account. Every action is logged in a file so that they understand any misuse of these administrative functions will be noted and dealt with appropriately. A good example of the usefulness of this page is the need for our employees to deal with print queues. Lab Assistants once had access to the print queues through the normal windows interface so that they could delete print jobs and pause or unpause printers. Unfortunately, they also had access to print queue settings and our system administrators were constantly repairing queues when a student changed settings while trying to fix a stuck print job. The webpage allows us to limit their access so they can't break what they shouldn't be touching. It's no longer all or nothing.

## **7.2 Databases**

We use several Access databases to help organize our knowledge bases and processes. We have databases where employees can request subs if they need time off. One of our databases contains information about every machine we control and is used to track hardware or software problems with a machine. Another is our knowledge base. Lab Assistants enter in problems they encounter in the labs and, where they know them, a solution. Other employees can look at this database and enter in solutions as well so that everyone is working together to solve problems. All of our databases are searchable so that once a solution to a problem is found it is available to everyone. Nobody has to re-invent the wheel and time is saved. Each time a new problem or solution is entered, an email is generated and sent to the email distribution list so that everyone knows as soon as a solution is found. It also helps the office staff keep track of common problems in the lab and alerts us to flaws in the lab design. We use ASP code to link the databases to the web pages. This makes the databases accessible from any of our labs and also means that our employees can use the databases without the ability to change their structure.

## **7.3 Interactive Websites**

For the Fall semester we are also planning to release another website for the lab assistants using a package called WebCT. This site will allow us to implement some real-time, interactive tools as well. It will include a bulletin board so that threaded discussions are possible. Discussions about policy or funny stories will be placed here. There is also a chat feature with multiple rooms. We can have the students log into the chat rooms so that if someone has a question, they can pose it to the chat room and have 14 people solving the problem instead of one. This is much faster than sending out an email message. It also allows our employees to get to know each other if we set up a room topic or two as "non-work." It has a calendar feature so that all deadlines can be located in one spot. Time card deadlines, due dates for competency exams, and due dates for schedules could be stored in one place so that employees can look them up, rather than our answering email from four different people with the same question. Since WebCT is designed to facilitate online classes, we can also design tests and quizzes to be administered over the web. Scores and points for many different things can also be displayed in the grade book

## **8. ONGOING OR LONG-TERM TRAINING**

We feel it's important to provide some on-going training for our student workers, especially since we can only give them a crash course training when they're hired. Selecting appropriate topics and using more than one training medium is also important.

### **8.1 Training Topics**

It's important to think creatively when trying to select training topics. We try to provide some training methods that improve their technical knowledge and give them exposure to new programs and situations. Don't forget that many students are not planning to stay in the computer industry when they graduate. You can provide training opportunities that benefit all of your workers, even if it's not related to computers. A training session on sexual harassment or how to deal with difficult customers could be useful. Hopefully a session on organizational skills will

not only make your workers more organized while they're working for you, it will also benefit them when they leave. Remember that your university would not exist without students and that everything we do should benefit them, whether or not they work for you. They don't stop being students when they clock in.

## 8.2 Instructor-led Training

Most people learn best in an environment where there is an instructor or someone to interact with. Once a month we offer a two-hour training session for lab assistants. The topic changes each month. The dates and locations can change as well. As always we try to remember that we are dealing with students. We offer the same training two nights in a row. Often times a student has a night class on one night of the week, but not another. Perhaps you have scheduled them to work in a lab one night but not the other. Holding the training twice makes it accessible to more of your employees, especially if you have to leave someone working in the labs or answering phones while everyone else is at training. We also try to hold trainings on evenings and weekends. Most students take their classes during the day, so we avoid more scheduling conflicts by meeting during off-peak hours. The goal here is to make the sessions open to as many people as possible.

Along these same lines, we also hold periodic mandatory meetings. While we don't count these as actual training hours, we use them as an opportunity to teach the employees about current problems and specific solutions. It's a chance to touch base with them as a whole and for them to voice concerns to us. We have often discovered that many of our employees are having the same problem all over campus but because they're not together in one place often, they don't communicate with each other. They believe they're seeing an isolated problem, when it might be much larger in scale and something that we as supervisors should address. Again, we hold these meetings two nights in a row so that we can keep our labs open and still have most everyone make it to the meetings.

## 8.3 Self-paced Training

We also make sure that our employees have the ability to work independently. We do not have a large enough staff to allow us to train all the time. It's up to the students take the responsibility to learn something on their own too. We do this through "competency exams," which is a bit of a misnomer. These are simply documents in Word format that we email to lab assistants. We ask them to perform specific tasks in various programs or ask questions about a program or policy. These are designed to improve an employee's technical skills and give them exposure to different software packages. The students are allowed to complete them at their own pace and email them back to us for grading when they're done.

The tests cover basic skills in the most common software packages. The first test is over policies and procedures and basic Windows skills like creating shortcuts and taking screen captures. The second test covers Word and Excel while test 3 deals with PowerPoint and Access. Tests 4 and 5 deal with other software like statistical packages, graphics programs, publishing software, and HTML. Each test becomes a bit more complex and detailed, demanding a bit more effort from the student.

The questions do not have to be all encompassing. One question we ask is "What is the maximum number of stars

available on the Starfield Simulation screensaver?" We don't actually care that there are 200 stars in this particular screen saver. But in order to answer this question, the student has to learn how to open the desktop settings menu, turn on and select a screen saver, and change the settings. They can now help a client customize their desktop.

## 8.4 Role-playing

This is something we began using just this year in our training sessions. Experience is the best teacher, but we don't want to send our employees out into the wild without some hands-on interaction. We have created some scenarios for use in a role-playing exercise. They consist of common situations a lab assistant might face. We provide specific details for a situation. One person acts as the client and one is the lab assistant. They each have some pieces of the puzzle to solve the problem. The trick is for the student worker to coax the correct information out of the client, as this is one of the most common problems one faces when providing computer support. Many of the situations sound very familiar at first, but there are different causes for the problem. This teaches the students the importance of asking the right questions and phrasing them very carefully to get the right information. Another situation might be an irate customer that simply cannot be helped by a student worker. We often have a staff member play the part of the irate customer so that we can see how a student will handle a tense situation. By practicing this before sending them into the labs we can help those who might have more of a problem before it's too late. While some students might think role playing a bit "corny," most of them end up having quite a bit fun with it, since they get to confuse each other and make someone else work to get information.

## 9. TRACKING STUDENT PROGRESS

Keeping track of student progress can be very useful in many regards. First of all, we find it necessary to keep track of tests and training session in order to track points and raises, as we will discuss shortly. It's also very useful when someone calls for a reference for one of your employees. If you carefully document what tests and training an employee has completed, you can give a more accurate and complete description of someone's skills and abilities. It's possible that we will not see an employee much after the initial training sessions. Sometimes they staff labs across campus or after hours and we know them only through the emails they send and tests they complete. Having accurate documentation is also just a good idea in case there is a dispute with an employee. If you can show who has and has not completed trainings, you can justify raises and rehiring decisions.

### 9.1 The Point System

We have implemented a very specific system to track the progress of our student employees. This system is based on points and tracks all the different methods our students can use to earn raises or incentives. Under this system a student works to earn points, which can be exchanged for a raise. One point is equivalent to a one cent raise. Because of our paperwork processes, an employee must earn a minimum of 10 points before they are granted a raise. Each test completed earns the student 5 points. They can earn 5 points for attending 4 hours worth of training. By finding solutions to the problems listed in the database they can earn one point per solution. Also, in the past we gave our students a 20 cent raise for each year they worked

with us. Now, we give them 20 points. While this is basically giving them the same raise, it makes it possible for us to track a student's total progress with us, whether it's years on the job or special training sessions.

We also needed to make it flexible enough to allow for "arbitrary" raises. Occasionally we assign someone to a special project or task that requires them to learn more or improve their skills in some way. Working at the ResNet fair and installing Ethernet cards on personal computers, for example, gives them exposure to different hardware and operating systems. They must learn about device drivers and system resources, things they don't need to know when working in the labs. We often give raises when they do things like this, so we included a clause in the Point System that says "at the discretion of the full-time staff, additional points may be given for special training or projects."

We use an Excel spread sheet to track the points. We have built equations, formulas, and macros into the sheet so we put in the date a test was completed or the reference number to a solution in the database and it automatically calculates how many points have been earned. It also tells us when a student has earned enough points for a raise and how much they should be making. One click of a button and the balance is taken back to zero and the pay rate is adjusted.

One benefit of referring to points is that it takes the students' focus off of money. While the dollars and cents might be the motivating factor, we talk in terms of points. Rather than saying "You've earned a 5 cents raise" we say "You've earned 5 points." The focus then becomes earning enough points to get another (or the next) raise, rather than the amount of money that will be added to their paycheck. For example, our students focus on the fact that they only have to go to two training sessions to get five points. They think that's easy. They don't stop to think that it takes them 4 months before they see a raise out of it, and that the raise isn't worth that much. They know they're being paid more, and that makes them happy enough.

## **10. MAKING STUDENTS WANT TO IMPROVE**

We would all like to believe that student employees are willing to improve their skills and learn more simply because they will be better employees. However, this is not usually the case. Once again we must remember that we are dealing with students and that they spend a great deal of time studying for their classes. Asking them to take even more time to study or learn is simply not effective. Demanding that students improve in order to keep their jobs is also not a good option, since it can make them angry or defensive. They might attend a mandatory training session, but they won't get as much out of it as they will when they see it as their choice and think that they are getting something out of it.

We've already discussed the option of training students in skills that will apply no matter what job they take later. Placing a letter in a student's file that states they have completed a certain training can be a good idea. It takes very little effort but is something that a student can take with them when trying to apply for jobs when they graduate and leave your department. It's one more benefit they can see that applies to and benefits them outside their job with you. We also point out that experience working for us and any trainings a student completes looks very good on a

resume. It shows a potential employer that a person has customer service experience and technical skills.

Never underestimate the power of a raise or the promise of some other perk. The raise you offer does not have to be significant. A five cent raise for one student means very little in terms of your budget, considering that most students only work part time. A 5 cent raise for a student who works 20 hours each week means a difference of 4 dollars in your payroll for the month. To the student, it can make a huge difference, if only in morale. Students rarely think about the total difference in the paycheck at the end of the month. Instead, they focus on the fact that they are making more money per hour.

When it comes time to schedule our employees, we give preference to those who have completed tests and gone to training sessions. The more trained the employee is, the higher they are on the totem pole when we assign duties. A student can get staffed in a better lab if they've invested the time and energy to improve themselves. They, of course, look only at the fact that they get put in a better lab.

We also try to mention those lab assistants who have excelled in the past and offer them up as an example to our current employees. By talking about what some have achieved because they put forth a bit of extra effort and gone through the different training programs, we hope to encourage others to accomplish the same things. This is especially effective when someone has used the knowledge and skills from their time with us after they have moved on and gone into something outside our field. Transferable skills are good incentive for student workers.

Overall, we try to emphasize that our students will get out what they put in. If they give us the extra effort and time to improve their skills, we will reward them in different ways. These rewards do not tax our resources beyond their limits. We have tried to set up systems that will make students want to improve because they get something back out of it if they put something into it. Before long, we don't have to push employees to learn new things; they do it for themselves. It doesn't take too much time for us to administer or cost us too much money. In exchange, we get better-trained employees.

## **11. SHORTCUTS**

As we're all busy and need to save time and energy, shortcuts are important to everyone. Here are some quick ideas that might help.

When it comes time to train students, don't try to do everything yourself. You can contact other people in your department and beyond to help you. If you want to offer a training session on advanced tips and tricks in Excel, talk to your Office Aide or Accountant who uses the program every day. They might know nothing but that one program, but it's one less training you have to design and lead. It's also nice to acknowledge the skills and expertise of other people. This can also help if you use letters of completion in employee files. A letter from a Human Resources trainer saying a student attended a session on sexual harassment might mean more than one signed by you.

During our initial training sessions we cover the basic concepts and rules, but leave the specifics up to them. We provide very comprehensive information that our workers can access. Rather than reading every word of the University

Regulation concerning computing on campus, we teach the basic concepts and main points. It's then up to the student to read the whole document. It's important to decide what is most important. Anything that isn't critical or is just details may have to wait. Don't be afraid to leave some things up to the student to learn on their own. Even though they're new at this, we can't spoon-feed them every piece of information. College is supposed to make them more self-sufficient, and we're not exempt from aiding in that process. Give them the support they need, but make sure they understand the responsibility is theirs.

Using existing tools is very important as well. When designing an interactive website we chose to use WebCT because we already had it here at UW. It comes with bulletin boards and chat rooms already built in. We don't have to spend the time to code the sites, just change a few headings here and there to make it more personalized and specific. You can do the same thing using different internet sites. You might look at eCircles, MSN Communities, or similar services. You can restrict access to these so that nobody can join without your approval. There are different useful features like chat rooms, photo albums, and calendars, depending on which service you use. You get the benefit of the features without having to build or maintain them.

And for one more shortcut, we've put several of our documents online so that you can refer to them in the future. Feel free to copy and revamp these as you need. The documents are located at <http://microlab.uwyo.edu/siguccs2000>. There isn't a link to the page anywhere on the main site, so you'll need the URL to get there.

## **12. PAPERWORK AND POLICIES**

Whatever you decide to do with your training and incentives program, there are some overarching guidelines that are important to bear in mind.

As with everything you do, make sure to get approval from the appropriate administrators. They may have some things to say about what items and topics are critical to include in the trainings. They might even be willing to help cover some of the administrative policies during your training session! We had to

get approval of the printing costs and eight hours of wages for each student for our initial implementation of this program. We also managed to get approval to buy pizza and drinks for everyone, so that nobody had to leave for lunch during the eight hour session.

Keep a paper trail of everything. We have each new employee check off a sheet listing what they have been trained in. This way we have the student's own signature proving they were trained in something if a problem should arise with them later. They can't simply claim, "Nobody ever told me that." It also makes it easier to clarify policies and keep trainings universal. If there is even a chance that more than one person will be conducting the training session at different times, it's vital to ensure consistency. If you have very clear training guidelines and materials, everyone will be trained in the same things in the same manner, no matter who conducts the training or when it's held.

Make sure that your Human Resources department and Work Study offices know what you're up to as well. They can often help you in training matters. It's also important that you discuss with them the possibility that you are going to be giving students raises or incentives. There may be administrative, political, or legal issues that you are not aware of. You will need to determine what type of paperwork must be submitted to give a raise to students who have work-study money. You may have to be careful about what types of incentives you offer, depending on what your Employment Practices (EEO) policies and state regulations are. The best policy is check everything with everyone. Twice.

## **13. ADAPT THESE IDEAS!**

Everything outlined in this paper is merely a suggestion and a look at what we have done at the University of Wyoming. Naturally not everything we do will work with every location, because everyone does things a little bit differently. Some schools offer a telephone help desk for support calls rather than staffing employees in the labs. If this is the case for you, you will no doubt need to modify the ideas listed above to fit your needs. Rather than role-playing face to face, you might want to staff your student on a phone and have the other person call from a different location to create the most realistic simulation possible. You may not have access to an interactive web site for your students, so you need to come up with an alternative. The important thing to remember is that you can design an effective training and retention program for student employees without too much work. Look at what skills and abilities you want your employees to have, figure out the best way to train or hire for these things, and then implement your ideas. Focus on one area at a time so you don't get overwhelmed. Then make sure all the pieces fit together and that nothing was left out. When in doubt, ask your peers for ideas!