Starting off on the Right Foot: A Library New Student Employee Orientation

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Abstract

This article is for administrators, department heads, supervisors and anyone who employs students to assist with the day to day operation of their organization and want to maximize the experience and benefit for both the student and the organization. As service is the heart of the librarianship, it is critical that anyone working in the library start with a good foundation of training, tools and expectations in order to provide high quality service regardless of what area they are employed in. This is particularly important for student employees hired by the library many of which have never held a job let alone worked in a library. A good student employee orientation provides that foundation and leads to the development of good work ethics, a more positive work experience, collegiality and a habit of incorporating learning experiences as part of the job.

Keywords

Cover Page Footnote

David G . Bowers and Stanley E . Seashore "Predicting Organizational Effectiveness with a Four-Factor Theory of Leadership." Administrative Quarterly 11.2 (2014): 238–263. Print. Dunlap, Lanee "A Game Plan for Student Employee Orientation.: EBSCOhost." N. p., n.d. Web. 6 Nov. 2014. Jennerich, EZ. "The Long-Term View of Library Staff Development: The Positive Effects on a Large Organization." College & Research Libraries News 67 (2006): 612–614.

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By James Williams III

This article is for administrators, department heads, supervisors, and anyone who employs students to assist with the day to day operation of their organization and intends to maximize the experience and benefit for both the student and the organization. Certainly, one key aspect of success in any career is the ability to feel confident that one can perform the duties and responsibilities of the job well. Just as an employee orientation is necessary for permanent staff to acclimate to their new positions, I would assert that employee orientations are vital for student success working at the library. According to Bowers and Seashore, "Employee orientation is described as behavior by a supervisor, which indicates that he feels that the 'human relations' aspect of the job is quite important; and that he considers the employees as human beings of intrinsic importance, takes an interest in them, and accepts their individuality and personal needs."

Understanding the value of a well-developed orientation and the impact it has on experiential learning for students, the library decided to implement a student orientation program for all student employees. Since the Circulation Department student orientation at the College of Charleston library was so successful, it was chosen as the model and expanded to include all library student employees and the New Student Employee Orientation program was implemented.

Benefits and Opportunities

Team building, inclusion and higher job satisfaction are among benefits of conducting a student employee orientation. The orientation provides an opportunity by giving new and returning student employees a chance to see, meet and connect with others like themselves working in the various departments of the library. They exchange personal, library, and non-library related information and form lasting bonds with their new friends. They ask each other questions regarding library and college policies and procedures as well as scheduling and useful general information on an ongoing basis. They teach each other shelving and searching techniques as well as computer tips. After the orientation, they appear to feel more comfortable asking each other to substitute for them when they are unable to work their shifts.

Additionally the orientation makes students feel that the library is interested in making them a part of the library family. Students get to meet staff from other library departments and learn about the duties the staff performs there. After participating in the orientation, students also feel more confident going to other library departments when their duties require it.   They gain a more holistic picture of how their jobs fit in the library workflow. Their overall job confidence and satisfaction level tend to increase much more quickly as a result. Along with their increased confidence, students also appear to acclimate to the job faster as they pay more attention to and better retain

the information relayed in the group setting. Exercises and games that students participate in during the orientation session are designed with knowledge acquisition in mind and students have fun while they learn. The fun and open atmosphere allows supervisors and veteran students to reinforce administrative tasks such as timesheets in a positive and supportive way rather than being overbearing. This leads to a better success rate for students to complete these tasks on their own and with fewer mistakes. Students also learn where they may find both physical and human resources they can consult throughout their college careers. The group training in an orientation is not intended to replace one-on-one training but to augment it. Jennerich states "as each group of new employees is integrated into the organization, the climate for learning and self-improvement is enhanced."

What We've Done

Our library orientation is held on a Saturday within the first 3 weeks of classes starting in the Fall semester and is mandatory for all student employees. The library notifies students as early as possible so that they don't plan other activities on that date and to give other student employees the opportunity to make arrangements if they do have prior obligations or need to get an excused absence from the head of the department. The orientation lasts 4 to 5 hours and students are compensated for their participation.

The library has employed a number of different components in the orientation sessions over the years and the staff has been very creative in their approach to planning and developing the orientation. All of the orientation sessions have themes. One year, the theme was Harry Potter and students were divided up in the different Hogwarts houses. In 2012 the theme was the

Olympics in honor of the Summer Olympics that year. Students were divided into teams from different countries. In 2013, the theme was comic book heroes. Students were asked to name their favorite comic book hero and 4 groups of heroes emerged. The use of themes gives students something fun and familiar outside of standard library decorum which helps make the atmosphere conducive to learning and aids in the students bonding as employees.

Interactive games were introduced to help students get to know one another. One game involved passing a bowl of M&Ms or Skittles around and asking students to take some from the bowl. Based on the number of candy pieces they had taken they were asked to say something about themselves- one fact for every M&M. If they had taken 4 pieces then they had to say 4 things about themselves. Another year we paired students together and gave them 5 minutes to get to know as much as they could about their partner. Then we asked each student to tell the entire group one thing they found interesting about their partner. Beyond the ice breakers, groups participated in learning games like Jeopardy where teams of students had to answer questions about the library for prizes. We toyed with the idea of using iClickers for library Jeopardy but never made this happen effectively due to the format of the questions. Even though the orientation was held in a remote area of the library, using noise makers such as horns or whistles as signals also proved to be disruptive. After lunch, scavenger hunts were conducted throughout the library where teams located answers to job related questions in the various departments to collect points. In the event of a tie, the first team to complete the hunt is the winner. Prizes ranged from free items and discount coupons donated by local businesses such as tote bags, water bottles, haircuts and

pizza. The library also designed a get-out-of-work-free pass. The pass gave the student an opportunity to notify the library that he/she would take an unpaid absence from work without an excuse. Students used their passes when they really needed to be absent and might not otherwise have been granted the time off. One year the library issued "study money" for students to use when they really needed the time off from work in order to study.

Most effective were the role-playing scenarios that demonstrated how to handle everything from a difficult patron to medical emergencies such as seizures. For this exercise, students asked each other how they should handle the situation. The staff was on hand to make sure the information given was correct and to reinforce key points. One year we discovered that the students thought they should call 911 during an emergency. Calling our campus' office of Public Safety was the correct procedure. Having students go through these exercises helped them learn in a non-threatening, open environment.

Collaborative Learning

As students reenacted various situations that could occur in the library and discussed how they thought the situations should have been handled, the students got the real experience of dealing with an emergency without the pressure or consequences. Together, they learned the correct customer service-driven approaches to handling difficult patrons and situations in a forum where no one was singled out for a perceived lack of knowledge. The library quickly discovered a number of areas to focus on and increase training in order to help students effectively handle these types of encounters. We also gave our student team leaders the opportunity to respond correctly

and identify gaps that may have existed in their own knowledge. The end product was a better trained student workforce and a higher level of customer service.

In an effort to have students meet and learn about the library staff, we provided a number of posters on easels around the room with staff photos, titles and departments. In some years the library also included one interesting fact about each staff member. This was helpful as it demonstrated to students that they shared some common interests with staff. Staff from all areas of the library participated in the orientation and answered questions regarding their prospective departments. Lunch was provided and was typically offered before the last session. The social aspect of lunch added an incentive to attend and provided another opportunity for students and staff to get to know each other.

The last part of the orientation was the breakout session where students went to their respective departments for group training relative to their specific duties. This session is typically 45 minutes to an hour and each department supplies its own training materials and approach.

Team Leaders

In recent years, we found that students respond better to mentoring and instruction from their peers who are seen as less authoritarian and threatening than the permanent staff. The purpose of the Team Leader Program is to identify, recognize, and reward student employees who have outstanding work ethics, strong leadership qualities, and excellent customer service skills. The program is designed to give them an opportunity to further develop and practice their leadership skills which can benefit them in future

positions. After one year of employment in the Circulation Department, student employees were considered for the Team Leader position based on performance, work ethic, demonstrated leadership qualities, customer service skills, and conduct. Also, the student employee must be responsible, dependable, and have the ability to encourage, motivate, and inspire a team. In 2012, six of our Team Leaders were nominated to be considered for various other leadership positions and opportunities across our campus and 5 of the 6 accepted offers. It is our belief that student employment should have a strong experiential learning component in order to help students develop a foundational work ethic and habits as for many of our students; this is their first job but surely not their last.

Assessment

As one would expect, a critical component of the orientation program is assessment. The New Student Employee Orientation program concludes with a survey where the students described what information was the most helpful as well as what was the least (see figure 1). We also included questions to discover the parts of the orientation which were the most engaging or fun. We used the survey results to further refine the orientation program for the next year. Using this method, we determined that the use of themes was highly successful in engaging-students by adding an element from outside the library that they can identify with.

Conclusion

The New Student Employee Orientation is just the start of what becomes an ongoing training which reflects changes in policies, procedures, and systems.
> "Training is a continuous process. The learning cycle never ends. A revision is necessary whenever there are major upgrades to the integrated library system or policies change."(Dunlap, 10)

We provide follow-up training, customer service videos as well as free webinars and online workshops such as OCLC's WebJunction, from which students can print out a certificate for participation in the program. The certificates can be added to the student's portfolio or resume. Materials such as the Circulation Training Manual (See figure 2) and Student Checklist (See figure 3) are available to students at all times to provide additional ongoing support. Overwhelmingly the students tell us year after year how beneficial the program is and we make sure that the students are involved in every stage from planning to assessment. Due to a major renovation over the summer, 2014 was the first year in the last 5 that the library did not offer a New Student Employee Orientation. We noticed that the library had a much lower student employee retention rate than in past years as well as an increase in ongoing training issues. Without having done a thorough assessment, it seems likely that at least some of these issues were due to our inability to have a New Student Employee Orientation at the start of the year.

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References

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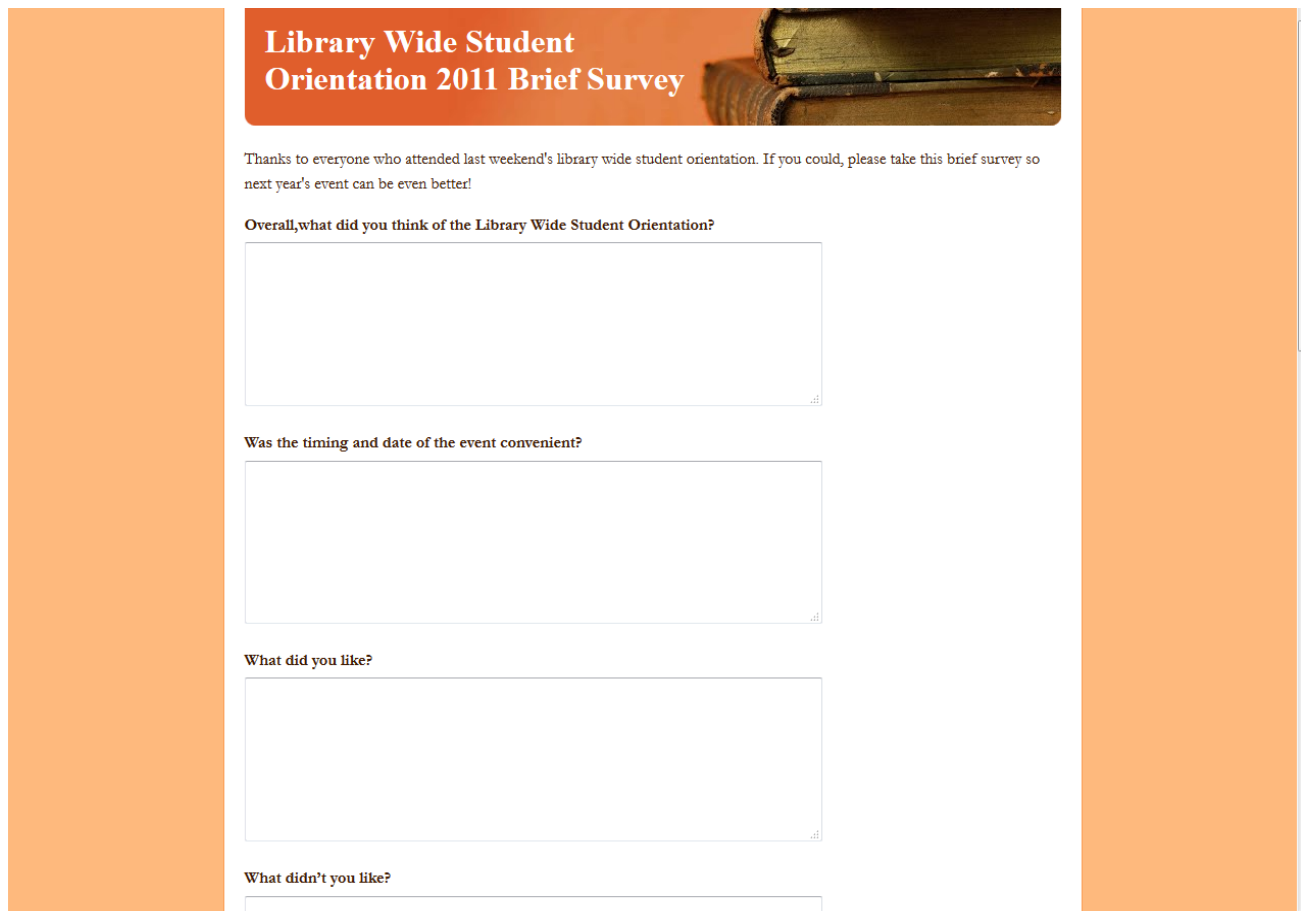
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Appendix

Fig. 1: **Student Orientation survey**

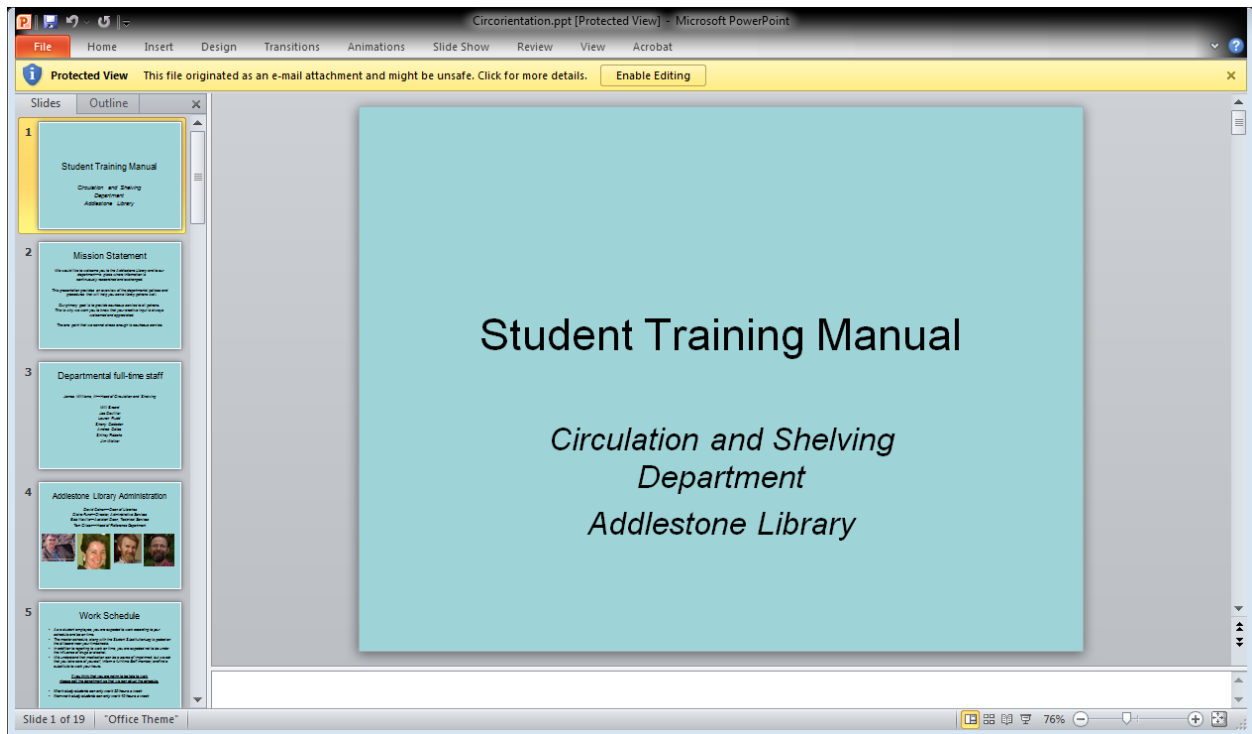Fig. 2 **Circulation Training Manual**

Fig. 3: Student training checklist

CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT STUDENT TRAINING CHECKLIST

<u>Library of Congress System</u>

_____   Take LC Easy computer test

<u>Desk Procedures</u>

_____   Place cards in Library of Congress order
_____   Know how to create a borrower record
_____   Know the types of circulating/ non-circulating materials
_____   Know how to charge books
_____   Know how to discharge books
_____   Know how to process damage books
_____   Know how to place Items on "hold"
_____   Know where "hold" shelves are located
_____   Know where special holding shelves are located
_____   Know relevant computer functions (H, BR, R, I, RB, CH, F, L, AC,?)
_____   Know how to collect fines
_____   Know the maximum fine
_____   Know how to write a receipt
_____   Know how to add PIN to patrons' records
_____   Be familiarized with master keys
_____   Be familiarized with the duress bottom
_____   Be familiarized with the automatic doors, monitors, and buttons
_____   Be familiarized with the alarm
_____   Know how to load copiers, and do general cleaning
_____   Know where vender card dispensers are located

<u>Telephone Procedures</u>

_____   Know how to answer the phones
_____   Know how to take messages
_____   Know how to transfer calls
_____   Know where staff phone list is located
_____   Know where the phone directories are kept

<u>Reserve Procedures</u>

_____   Know how to charge reserve material
_____   Know how to discharge reserve materiel
_____   Know how to prepare items to be processed
_____   Know the location of reserve log in sheets
_____   Know where to place Item to *be* processed for reserves
_____   Know where music CD's are kept

<u>Stack Maintenance</u>

_____   Know the location of sorting range

<u>Absences</u>

_____   Know procedure for obtaining **a** substitute
_____   Be familiarized with substitution log sheets

<u>Time Sheets</u>

_____   Know how to record hours daily
_____   Know where time sheets are kept
_____   Know that time sheets are to be signed Immediately

<u>Breaks</u>

_____   Be familiarized with break procedure

NOTE: **Your performance will be evaluated!!!**