

Student Workers – The Heart of the Help Desk

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ABSTRACT

Managing a Help Desk staffed with part-time student workers can be quite a challenge. However, it has been the experience of the Louisiana State University Office of Computing Services (OCS) Technology Support Staff that developing the right mix of procedures and policies makes for a much more efficient work environment for both the part-time student and the full-time personnel. This paper will focus on the policies and procedures put into place at the OCS Help Desk. This includes:

1. Obtaining the right student workers for a Help Desk environment: Support Staff from various departments within Computing Services developed a new program to attract, interview, test, and place potential student workers in the environment best suited to their wants and needs within the organization.
2. Training student analysts: Several traditional and non-traditional training methods are used in the OCS Help Desk environment that makes for a fun and challenging learning experience. On-Line testing, role playing, coaching, and one-on-one training are all ways in which students are trained at the Help Desk.
3. Providing the right resources and tools in order for them to do their job efficiently and correctly: Microsoft NetMeeting, MSN Messenger, Documentation, Knowledge Base, 2-way radios, Active Desktop, and daily information emails are examples of the various tools used by the student workers to effectively do their jobs.
4. Supporting and encouraging student workers: Evaluating techniques, monitoring, and reward systems are all used to help encourage and support our student worker staff.

Student workers are the heart of our Help Desk here at LSU. Faced with the many challenges of staffing a Help Desk with part-time student workers, OCS Help Desk management and staff have come up with creative processes and procedures to help transform the image of that of a traditional part-time student worker to part-time professional staff.

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Help Desk, Student Workers, Customer Support

1. INTRODUCTION

In the OCS Help Desk environment, student support representatives are the eyes and ears to the LSU community and the problems and/or concerns customers may face when they are dealing with technology. As a result, we have spent much time and effort in developing our student support representatives into well-rounded support employees whose main priority is providing top-notch service and support to the customer.

2. OBTAINING THE RIGHT STUDENT WORKERS FOR THE JOB

In order to provide quality service and support to the LSU community, support managers recognized the importance of placing the right people in the right positions. In order to achieve a suitable match of people and job function, support managers developed a new program. This program was developed to attract, interview, test, and place potential student workers in the environment best suited to their needs and wants within the organization. Once a student expresses an interest to work in our organization, an application is placed on file and managers are free to screen these applications when vacancies arise. Potential student employees are then asked to take an initial skills assessment test. This test is a series of questions pertaining to areas of interest as well as specific questions pertaining to the different support areas in the organization. Examples may include server support, web/application development, PC support, etc. The answers provided help managers determine the best fit between the student and the different areas within the organization. After initial testing, interested managers will schedule an initial interview with the job candidate. Several different support managers may participate in the initial interview to further determine the most appropriate fit for the potential candidate. Once the initial interview is complete, site tours are scheduled in order to get further feedback from the potential employee. After further discussion, management staff will suggest an appropriate fit for the new student employee.

By developing this hiring process, we expect a decrease in student worker turnover coupled with an increase in overall customer satisfaction.

3. TRAINING STUDENT ANALYSTS

Training is one of the most important tasks associated with the OCS Help Desk. For student technology representatives to provide excellent support, they must be trained accordingly. Although student employee turn-over is minimal, students who graduate or leave the university need to be replaced. In addition, with the ever expanding field of technology, continuous training must be attained. On-line testing, role playing, coaching, training videos, and one-on-one training sessions are all ways in which training is achieved at the OCS Help Desk.

Help Desk Management utilized the University BlackBoard system to develop weekly quizzes designed to test student technology representatives. Weekly quizzes consist of questions pertaining to a weekly topic and any problem or solution that may have surfaced during that week. Quiz participation and grades are used by the management staff during student evaluations. Questions from the quizzes are pooled and can be used for the skills assessment test for new hires. In addition, weekly training videos are posted for students to review. Questions pertaining to these videos are included on weekly quizzes. The videos are designed and developed by Help Desk management.

Student technology representatives give their input on the types of topics they would like to receive training on. Role playing between OCS Help Desk Management and student analyst is another way training is achieved at the OCS Help Desk. OCS Help Desk management staff reviews specific topics and all student workers are required to attend the training session. Open discussion and feedback are a significant part of this training exercise. Student technology representatives are encouraged to provide feedback on standard operating procedures. In addition, OCS Management participates in one-on-one training for those students who are new to the OCS Help Desk environment. This training exercise helps in preparing new student technology representatives for the types of phone calls they will be handling. Student technology representatives are asked to provide input and feedback in all areas of training. OCS Help Desk management encourages the student analysts to participate in every way possible in the growth of their position at the Help Desk.

4. PROVIDING RESOURCES AND TOOLS

In addition to ongoing training, OCS Help Desk Management strongly believes that providing the appropriate resources and tools will better help the student technology representatives provide excellent support and service to the customer. Microsoft NetMeeting, MSN Messenger, Documentation, Knowledge Base solutions, 2-way radios, active desktop, and daily informational emails are tools used by the Help Desk student support representatives to effectively provide the support the customer is looking for.

Microsoft NetMeeting is a tool used by the OCS Help Desk to provide Remote Desktop assistance to users across the LSU campus. In utilizing this resource, the OCS Help Desk has increased the percentage of calls that are resolved at Tier 1. Additionally, this tool allows the Help Desk student representative to provide support over the phone for problems that may have previously been resolved by a

field technician. This has increased the promptness of support resolutions and thus increased customer satisfaction.

MSN Messenger is an additional tool that is popular amongst the Help Desk technology representatives. This tool's main purpose is for open communication between Help Desk Management and the staff of student representatives. They are now able to obtain second level support at the click of a mouse. Help Desk Management is able to respond to questions and requests at a fraction of the time, increasing resolution quality and customer satisfaction.

OCS Help Desk Documentation and Right Answers Knowledge-Paks are tools used by technology representatives for speedy problem resolution. OCS Help Desk Documentation is maintained by both Help Desk Management and student support representatives. Documentation content is LSU specific and is available on-line at www.lsu.edu/helpdesk. For additional support, Help Desk support reps can logon to Right Answers which serves up hundreds of thousands of solutions to questions spanning more than 150 desktop computing applications[1].

2-way radios and active desktop give the students additional means of providing support to the LSU community. For example, if a customer calls from one of the many public access computer labs on LSU's campus, our Help Desk staff are able to radio a technician who can provide assistance in a fraction of the time is previously took. Again, this resource allows for decreased resolution time and increased customer satisfaction. In addition, Help Desk Management and student representatives utilize the active desktop utility, which contains commonly used phone numbers and information. It also allows for postings of alerts and notices. This gives the student representative viable information without spending time searching for it.

Help Desk statistics and information are emailed daily to all Help Desk support staff. Daily call statistics such as call volume and abandon rate are included in this email. In addition, any current outages or information pertaining to current events are included in this email. Reminders and notices are also posted in the daily informational email. This email is designed to inform the Help Desk staff of current performance of the Help Desk as well as news or current situations that they need to know in order to get the correct information to the end user.

5. EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

Evaluating performance of the Help Desk staff is important in not only encouraging improvements in performance, but allowing feedback to keep operations of the Help Desk smooth and efficient. Help Desk Management performs weekly call monitoring (see Figure 1). Help Desk staff are then scheduled for monthly discussions of their individual phone evaluations. This gives Management an opportunity to praise good performance and encourage changes in poor performance. This meeting also gives the student representative a chance to provide feedback on current operations and make recommendations for changes to more efficiently and effectively serve the LSU community. In addition, semester evaluations are performed and raises are recommended based on performance (see Figure 2).

OCS Help Desk Technology Support Representative Call Performance Evaluation

Date: _____

Agent Code: _____

Monitor Code: _____

WO Number: _____

Total Score: 0

NOTE: Place a "1" in the cell that corresponds to the performance evaluation rating

1. Did the representative initiate the support call according to required OCS Help Desk procedures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Did the representative identify and address the customer by name during the support call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Was it apparent that the representative used all resources available (Adv. Search, History, RightAnswers, Solutions) in attempting to assist the customer during the initial support call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did the representative respond to the customer in a timely manner and keep the customer informed during the support call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Was the representative responsive to the customer's needs and emotional state?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Totals=	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Figure 1 – Student Support Representative Phone Evaluation

6. ENCOURAGING AND REWARDING STUDENT WORKERS

Whether an employee is a student or a full time staff member, encouraging and rewarding best practices always makes for a positive work environment. OCS Help Desk Management strongly believes in encouraging and mentoring student technology representatives. Good work is recognized and made known to all members of the Help Desk team. Individual projects are encouraged and rewarded by Help Desk management. Appreciation and milestone parties are held often with much participation from Management Staff.

OCS Help Desk Technology Support Representative Call Performance Evaluation

Date: _____

SSR: _____

Supervisor: _____

Total Score: 0

NOTE: Place a "1" in the cell that corresponds to the performance evaluation rating

Customer Focus				
Takes ownership of the customer's support problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follows call handling procedures at the OCS Help Desk in a friendly, interested and professional manner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses the OCS Help Desk warm-transfer procedures for all calls that are transferred out of the OCS Help Desk queue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approaches difficult customers with patience, and if necessary, politely transfer these calls to a full-time staff member at the OCS Help Desk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creates work orders for all calls that are received at the OCS Help Desk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional knowledge and skills				
Is dependable and prompt when reporting to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Greets all walk-in customers in a friendly and professional manner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participates fully in all training opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exhausts all resources when attempting to resolve a technology support issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dresses appropriately when working at the OCS Help Desk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2 – Student Support Representative Semester Evaluation

7. CONCLUSION

Student workers are an integral part of the OCS Help Desk. By providing the OCS Help Desk Student Analysts with the tools and training necessary to do an effective job, our customer satisfaction and quality of service has risen dramatically. Help Desk Management staff has continually strived to eliminate the stigma associated with the "student worker" employee. By developing best practices and procedures, in addition to mentoring and reward systems, the perception of the "student worker" has slowly begun to change from that of a part-time student worker to a part-time professional staff. By treating our student workers as part-time professional employees, we have seen an increase in morale and enthusiasm toward their work and their work environment. Help Desk Management continues to obtain feedback from the OCS Student Analysts and provide the support and resources necessary for their professional growth and increased quality of service.

8. REFERENCES

[1] Right Answers. <http://www.rightanswers.com>