

# Training and Documentation

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## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 Project and People Management Training

**General Terms:** Documentation

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Training is a difficult process in any environment. Quietly recognizing the right mix of basics and more advanced processes to meet the needs of the different skill levels of the participants is a challenge. Any given workshop might consist of novice users to those who have used the software before, but want to use it more effectively. Training faculty members is even more complex. Faculty members are extremely busy. They each have multiple classes to prepare for, conduct, exams and papers to grade, office hours to keep, not to mention the time keeping up with developments specific to their disciplines. However in talking with them, faculties do recognize the need to upgrade their software skills and knowledge of advances in technology, but finding the time is not always a priority. The most convenient way of getting assistance is to call the Helpdesk for a telephone walkthrough of the exact process to solve their immediate problem. In addition, there is also the unspoken resistance of being tutored by someone who is perfectly competent in the subject matter, but who may not hold their level of professional education. You, the trainer, must be able to recognize this hesitation, accept it, be creative in implementing ways to promote yourself, and prove that you can help faculty and staff not only by helping them learn the software, but using it daily to make their jobs easier.

The trainer has to spend time developing relationships with the members of each department. He has to market his skills and reinforce his presence regularly with faculty members. Dropping in for a visit and to make sure that the faculty member is not having any software problems is a good way to market yourself and your services to faculty members. Chatting about the last workshop that the faculty member attended and what he or she might want to learn next is a good way to canvas for future workshop topics. Although we keep workshops small, some faculty members might be more forthcoming with learning concerns in the privacy of their offices than in the presence of peers who they might perceive as being savvier than they are concerning workshop topics. You can

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also e-mail participants as a courtesy follow-up and check for questions that they may have thought of after actually using the information.

Two very necessary traits of a good trainer are showing concern and being approachable.

At Millsaps we do our best to build good relationships with faculty. One example is prior to receiving a computer account at Millsaps, incoming faculty and staff are given a survey to fill out giving us a general overview of their knowledge of supported software. This is helpful in assessing the training needs of incoming faculty.

Millsaps' Department of Computer Services does not have a separate training department. All workshops are conducted by Computer Services helpdesk staff members. The helpdesk consists of four full time staff and four student workers during the school year. The helpdesk students are utilized as assistants to help workshop participants who are having trouble with the software.

At the beginning of every fall semester we conduct new faculty orientation. This orientation results in the opportunity for helpdesk staff to meet new faculty face to face, and gives the faculty a point of reference for our department—a person they have actually met, not just a vague department. The presentation is mandatory for all new faculty members. Participants are given a new user manual which contains hard copies of the basic documentation for supported software. The manual also contains information on the Computer Services staff and the links to our departmental Web pages. We include a presentation on computing at Millsaps. The presentation covers vital information for new faculty members beginning with an overview of the pc labs and their locations on campus, the equipment available in each, the number of students they will accommodate for class purposes, and the hours of operation. At this time we hold a brief question and answer period. We then proceed to an overview of the Computer Services department. We discuss our hours of operation, the building location of our office, view our department web pages; display examples of our documentation, the workshops that are scheduled for the coming semester and how to register for them. We take time during this part of the presentation to impress upon faculty that we will do all in our power to assist them in the coming year. We ask them to review the scheduled workshops and let us know if there is a topic that they would like to see a workshop on that is not currently listed. We also give emphasis that we are eager to work closely with them and their students in the coming year. We are more than willing to create class specific workshops to assist their students in completing class projects. Some examples of specialized workshops are: MS Excel workshops tailored for the Economics department and their students by using software to chart oil company prices; marketing students must use specific MS Word

report formatting for their assignments; E-commerce has a demand for web page creation using different software packages with coding and so forth. During the question and answer periods following the presentations, we gain even further insight into some of their training needs.

New faculty and staff are then offered a New Users workshop. This workshop covers the Millsaps network and personal network storage, Outlook mail management, and the Computer Services Web pages. Any users who are not present during the orientation is given a New Users Manual, and we again stress our commitment to assisting faculty in anyway we can with custom workshops for their students and themselves.

The Computer Services department has its own training room consisting of an instructor PC attached to a projector and nine additional PC's for hands on exercises. The workshops are small and no more than two hours in length, (time depending on the topic covered and the experience of the participants). Time is allowed for questions and input on additional topics that need to be addressed in future workshops. At the end of each workshop the participants fill out an evaluation of the subject matter (what was helpful to them, what could have made it more useful) and the trainer (was he or she knowledgeable of the topic, did the trainer answer questions easily, go to fast etc). This feedback enables us to constantly improve on the way we plan and develop our training. Workshops that do not "make" (have at least three participants) are examined to see if the topic was too general or perhaps not needed at all. We offer specific topics, such as using Excel to create grade sheets, as well as basic software concepts.

Keeping the workshops small gives the trainer and participants an opportunity to get to know each other. The workshop leader gets the opportunity to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of the participants. The trainer acquires valuable information on what additional assistance the participants need by seeing how the workshop participants react to the subject matter and listening to the questions asked during the session on ways that the software can be used by the attendees. The participants become acquainted with the trainer's strengths and weaknesses. They witness first hand how the workshop is conducted and how the leader answers, or doesn't answer, their questions.

We create new workshops each semester to try and cover as many topics during the school year as possible. Our first concern when creating training for faculty and staff at Millsaps is new versions of supported software. We create workshops that focus on the new features of the software and explain the differences between newer and older versions; participants like to understand why changes were made by the vendor. Documentation is created utilizing screenshots of the new features and is handed out at the beginning of each workshop. The second thing we consider is requests for assistance that come to the helpdesk. When a topic is repeated on a regular basis, such as how to mail merge, how to import class rosters into their contacts for distribution lists or into excel for grade sheets, we then create a workshop to focus on that topic. The third consideration is the knowledge of our users. This is the hardest part of creating training. As stated previously, any given workshop could be composed of novices and more advanced users. Finding a happy medium between the two so that no one feels bored or like they are overwhelmed is difficult. We try to create workshops with differing levels so that faculty and staff will know before hand what the class will cover. The workshops are listed on

our departmental web pages with the date, time and a brief description of the material to be covered and whether it is a basic or more advanced workshop. We schedule one workshop a week at the beginning of each semester on different topics and at differing levels of competency. The topics covered come from the overviews filled out when a computer account is requested, the workshop evaluations we receive, specific requests by faculty, and the helpdesk calls received. By only scheduling one workshop a week, we have the flexibility to create additional workshops as we become aware of the need, and to conduct multiple instances of scheduled workshops to meet the time constraints of faculty members who need to attend and have busy schedules. Although, on occasion, we do one-on-one sessions, we do try to limit these. If a faculty member cannot meet the schedule we have set, we ask them if they can find others who would like to take the workshop. This doubly involves the faculty member in the training process. If the topic is one that all faculty members need (we recently converted to Dreamweaver for creation and editing of departmental web pages. The decision was also made not to allow student workers access to the web server, making it mandatory for faculty and staff members to learn how to use Dreamweaver and FTP), we e-mail each department with a schedule of the workshops. Additional workshops are added as the need arises and we e-mail faculty on the availability of seats and to remind them of the workshops that they have signed up for.

In addition to giving faculty members hard copies of all software documentation in their user manual, posting the information on our departmental web pages, and holding workshops where participants are given documentation on the subject matter, we have also created a software tips monthly newsletter called the Software Sampler.<sup>1</sup> These are short two-page newsletters that give tips on a particular software package. Past topics have been Outlook mail management, pivot tables in Excel, Kiosk mode in PowerPoint, using graphics in Word, and creating macros in both Word and WordPerfect. These newsletters are placed on our web pages in PDF format and the link to the current month's newsletter is e-mailed to both faculty and staff. Past newsletters are available from the web also. Since the format of the newsletter is short, the topic is discussed generally. Screen shots are used in the newsletters, as in all our documentation. If more information on the topic is requested, we can create a workshop to go into the topic in more detail.

We try to make the documentation for the software we support as detailed as possible. Screen shots are included as much as possible. This enables the faculty member to work through the software step-by-step using documentation before a workshop. Screenshots are also necessary because faculty members may take a workshop but not actually have time to use the software until much later. Screenshots are viewed as a tool to help enable the faculty member to recall the outline of the workshop.

The Computer Services department at Millsaps is constantly evaluating our training methods to ensure that our faculty and staff get the most out of our services.

## References

[1] Example of *Software Sampler* included with this document. Information gathered from Microsoft Office Assistance Center web page-PowerPoint.