

Transitioning to Unstaffed Computing Sites

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ABSTRACT

University budget issues have amplified concerns about the number of students that must be employed to cover the Consultant shifts in the University computing sites. Hiring, training, and supervising large numbers of student employees require endless amounts of time and energy. Despite these issues, customer service expectations remain high. Transitioning to unstaffed computing sites may prove to be the perfect solution.

Several alternatives have been proposed, including eliminating the Consultant position all together. Our preferred alternative is to staff only the four main computing sites plus two residence hall sites with Consultants.

Staffing only the four main computing sites plus two residence hall sites with Consultants will allow a reduction in work force without cutting the Consultant position completely. Work force reduction results in cost savings. Work force reduction will also create a more manageable group of employees, improving the quality of hiring, training, and supervising.

Retained employees will be provided with extensive training opportunities, raising their skill and knowledge level to be more consistent with the high expectations of customers. Customers will have the option to visit the remaining staffed sites for immediate hands-on assistance. Customers visiting unstaffed sites may phone the Computing Sites Support Center for immediate phone assistance, and a Support Specialist can be dispatched to the site to provide hands-on assistance.

Categories & Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 Project and People Management
Staffing

General Terms

Management, Economics, Experimentation.

Keywords

Budget issues, staffing levels, unstaffed sites, customer service expectations, cost factors, site usage reports.

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1. BACKGROUND

University budget issues have amplified concerns about the number of students that must be hired to cover the Consultant shifts in the IAT Services Computing Sites. In addition, customers, both internal and external, and Sites student employees have notified the Sites staff of problems stemming from staffing levels.

2. ISSUES

Staffing levels required to meet the demand of the computing sites' hours of operation are high. Hiring students to fill all shifts is nearly impossible.

3. FACTS BEARING ON THE ISSUE

Budget issues place restrictions on recruiting and maintaining quality employees. Hiring, training, and supervising large numbers of student employees require endless amounts of time and energy. Despite these issues, customer service expectations remain high.

Historical reference: Over the past few semesters, the Sites Manager has studied the Sites Usage statistics and determined that most classroom sites and low usage sites continue to operate well unstaffed. The following sites have been designated as unstaffed and operated as such without ramifications: Brady Commons, Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center (not staffed until 4pm), Engineering Building West 145, General Classroom Building 124A and 222A, Agriculture 2-11, Walter Williams.

3.1 Budget

- ✓ Students must be willing to accept \$5.50 hourly wages.
- ✓ Students may not receive raises.
- ✓ Students have a cap on wages.

3.2 Hiring

- ✓ Students must be enrolled at least halftime each semester to be considered for IAT Services employment.
- ✓ International students are limited to working 20 hours per week.
- ✓ Students working at 25% GRA/TA positions on campus cannot work the minimum required hours of a Consultant (9) because of the Fair Labor Act.
- ✓ Students working at 50% GRA/TA positions on campus are limited to 13 hours per week because of the Fair Labor Act.

- ✓ Students must be willing to work all hours of the day, weekends, breaks, and intersession.
- ✓ Site Coordinators must interview and process paperwork for large numbers of new hires. These processes are time-consuming.
- ✓ Coordinator Support personnel must create and maintain shift schedules for large numbers of employees. Flexible scheduling requires a greater number of hires and is time-consuming.

3.3 Training

- ✓ Scheduling multiple sessions, rooms, and trainers is required for large numbers of employees. Manageability of such an endeavor is difficult.
- ✓ Maintaining training documentation is time-consuming.
- ✓ Printing training documentation for large numbers of employees is costly.
- ✓ Recruiting trainers necessitates the subject matter experts taking time away from their normal duties.
- ✓ Providing in-depth training is not a viable option for large numbers of employees. Customers must accept the fact that Consultants have varied skill and knowledge levels.

3.4 Supervising

- ✓ Students must manage their time among academics, job, family, and social activities. This juggling act presents several obstacles:
 - Need time off for course work, classes, labs, exams, study groups, etc.
 - Need time off for illness.
 - Need time off for family issues and home visits.
 - Need time off to attend social functions.
 - Late arrivals attributed to academics, job, family, and social activities.
- ✓ Site Coordinators are forced to rely on Support Specialists to coach and mentor the Consultants. Large numbers of employees and varied shifts make it difficult to supervise personally.

3.5 Customer Service

- ✓ Customers expect Consultants to have the answers to all questions.
- ✓ Customers expect the machines to work. If a problem arises they expect the Consultants to troubleshoot and solve all mechanical difficulties immediately.
- ✓ Consultants have varied skill and knowledge levels owing to the impracticality of providing in-depth training for large number of employees.
- ✓ Consultant motivation is low because of budget issues and boredom. Boredom is attributed to down time during low sites usage (see Appendix A – Sites Usage). Highly specialized sites also contribute to the diminished need for Consultant assistance.

4. OPTIONS

4.1 Eliminate All Consultant Positions

Pros: Consultant duties are replicated by the Support Specialist position. Reduction in work force will negate the redundancy and equal a cost savings (see Appendix B– Staffing Level Comparison and Cost Factors). Fewer hires equates to a reduction in time and energy spent on hiring, training, and supervising. Customer service issues will be addressed by providing immediate phone assistance via the Site Support Center. In addition, Support Specialists will continuously make rounds to the sites and can be dispatched to a site to provide hands-on assistance within a 5-minute* timeframe.

**Dependent on number of additional Support Specialists hired to roam.*

Cons: Customers have no immediate hands-on assistance; nevertheless their expectations will remain high.

4.2 Staff High Traffic and Contractual Sites

Pros: Consultant duties are replicated by the Support Specialist position. Reduction in work force will negate some redundancy and equal a cost savings (see Appendix B – Staffing Level Comparison and Cost Factors). Fewer hires equates to a reduction in time and energy spent on hiring, training, and supervising. Customer service issues will be addressed by providing immediate phone assistance via the Site Support Center. In addition, Support Specialists will continuously make rounds to the sites and can be dispatched to a site to provide hands-on assistance within a 10-minute* timeframe.

**Dependent on number of additional Support Specialists hired to roam.*

Cons: Customers have limited access to immediate hands-on assistance; nevertheless their expectations will remain high.

4.3 Maintain Status Quo

Pros: No changes in the staffing levels for the computing sites.

Cons: No changes in the staffing levels for the computing sites. All facts bearing on the issue still remain.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Staff High Traffic and Contractual Sites

Staffing only the 4 main computing sites plus 2 residence hall sites with Consultants will allow a reduction in work force without cutting the Consultant position completely. Work force reduction results in cost savings. Work force reduction will also create a more manageable group of employees, improving the quality of hiring, training, and supervising.

Retained employees will be provided with extensive training opportunities, raising their skill and knowledge level to be more consistent with the high expectations of customers. Customers will have the option to visit the remaining staffed sites for immediate hands-on assistance. Customers visiting unstaffed sites may phone the Computing Sites Support Center for immediate phone assistance, and a Support Specialist can be dispatched to the site to provide hands-on assistance.

6. APPENDIX A – SITES USAGE

The main sites were chosen after studying the Sites Usage statistics. The statistics compute the average PC usage from 8/26/02 through 11/08/02 and reveal that only 5 sites maintain a 70% or better usage at least 4 days a week at least 4 hours a day. We must also maintain staffing for the Blair and Pershing residence hall sites as IAT Services has an MOU with Residential Life.

Table 1. High traffic and contractual sites usage statistics

Site	Maximum usage	# of days maximum usage maintained	Average timeframe of maximum usage
Arts & Sciences	70%	5 days	9am-2pm
Cornell 004	70%	4 days	9am-4pm
Engineering Building West 142/ East W2003*	70%	4 days	10am-4pm
Memorial Union	70%	4 days	10am-2pm
Blair	30%	N/A	N/A
Pershing	35%	N/A	N/A

- ★ After much peer discussion, it was determined that we should drop Engineering Building East W2003 for the purposes of this white paper. This particular site is highly specialized for engineers. It is doubtful that the Consultants could provide quality customer service regarding software questions, as the Consultants are trained only on general information with limited knowledge of specific software applications.

The remaining four currently staffed sites (Middlebush, Physics, Stanley, Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center) were dropped from consideration due to low usage. Factors such as location and exclusive users have contributed to the low usage and/or the diminished need for Consultant assistance.

7. APPENDIX B – STAFFING LEVEL COMPARISON AND COST FACTORS

7.1 Average Wage/Average Hours

Consultant average wage = \$6.05

Consultant average weekly hours = 12

Support Specialist average wage = \$7.75

Support Specialist average weekly hours = 18

7.2 Eliminate All Consultant Positions

Current staffing levels = 142 Consultants, 24 Support Specialists

Proposed staffing levels = 0 Consultants, 38 Support Specialists

Cutting 142 Consultant positions, adding 14 Support Specialists

Current Consultant average payroll per week = \$10,309.20
(average wage x average hours x 142 Consultants)

Proposed Consultant average payroll per week = \$0

Saving \$10,309.20 per week in Consultant pay

Current Support Specialist average payroll per week = \$3348
(average wage x average hours x 24 Support Specialists)

Proposed Support Specialist average payroll per week = \$5301
(average wage x average hours x 38 Support Specialists)

Additional costs of \$1953 per week in Support Specialist pay

7.3 Staff High Traffic and Contractual Sites

Current staffing levels = 142 Consultants, 24 Support Specialists

Proposed staffing levels = 91 Consultants, 31 Support Specialists

Cutting 51 Consultant positions, adding 7 Support Specialists

Current Consultant average payroll per week = \$10,309.20
(average wage x average hours x 142 Consultants)

Proposed Consultant average payroll per week = \$6,606.60
(average wage x average hours x 91 Consultants)

Saving \$3702.60 per week in Consultant pay

Current Support Specialist average payroll per week = \$3348
(average wage x average hours x 24 Support Specialists)

Proposed Support Specialist average payroll per week = \$4324.5
(average wage x average hours x 31 Support Specialists)

Additional costs of \$976.50 per week in Support Specialist pay

7.4 Maintain Status Quo

Current staffing levels = 142 Consultants, 24 Support Specialists

Current Consultant average payroll per week = \$10,309.20
(average wage x average hours x 142 Consultants)

Current Support Specialist average payroll per week = \$3348
(average wage x average hours x 24 Support Specialists)