

# UW-Madison Student Leadership Project

Jack Lepak

Support Operations Supervisor  
University of Wisconsin - Madison  
Division of Information Technology  
1210 W. Dayton Street  
Madison, WI 53706  
(608) 262-8148  
jlepak@wisc.edu

Dan Metzger

Student Manager 2<sup>nd</sup> Shift University  
of Wisconsin - Madison Division  
of Information Technology  
1210 W. Dayton Street  
Madison, WI 53706  
(608) 661-8361  
dpmetzger@wisc.edu

Bryan Reagan

Student Manager 1<sup>st</sup> Shift University  
of Wisconsin - Madison Division  
of Information Technology  
1210 W. Dayton Street  
Madison, WI 53706  
(608) 661-4447  
boreagan@wisc.edu

## ABSTRACT

The University of Wisconsin - Madison Division of Information Technology (DoIT) Help Desk and Campus Computer Labs offers an opportunity for student employees to become involved in leadership roles by participating in the Student Leadership Project (SLP). This project provides student employees with real world experience in the management and delivery of information technology services. By gaining experience in conjunction with their academic career, students will be better prepared to enter the workforce by bringing with them a wealth of IT and business knowledge.

The DoIT Help Desk and Campus Computer Labs employ approximately 125 staff with a mixture of fulltime personnel and part time student staff. The SLP students work in the Help Desk's call center, advanced support group and computer labs. They are full participants in managing and facilitating day-to-day operations (e.g., hiring, training, coach, schedule, etc.) and in maintaining the usability of all the computers in the production environment.

This summer, we will be entering the fourth year of the Student Leadership Project. There are 10 leadership positions available for students with both a management and technical track. This presentation will provide an overview of the program with perspectives from the student leaders.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Management of Computing and Information Systems]:  
Project and people management - *Management Techniques,*  
*Staffing, Training*

## General Terms

Management, Performance, Human Factors

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## Keywords

University of Wisconsin - Madison  
DoIT – Division of Information Technology  
Student Management / Student Leadership Project (SLP)  
Campus Help Desk  
Campus Computer Labs

## 1. Introduction

The UW Division of Information Technology (DoIT) is the central IT shop for computing at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. DoIT provides a wide variety of technology services to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. DoIT also provides service to UW System and other State entities. Our services span desktop-to-server-to-mainframe computing, networks, Internet connectivity, telecommunications, administrative and academic systems, instructional technology, and a related support services. We work with colleges, departments and individuals to develop and implement new systems. At the same time, we provide quality service on current systems and work with our customers to migrate them from older technologies. From installing and supporting internet access in university offices and dormitories, to creating and maintaining a web portal students use to register for classes and to check grades, DoIT reaches every individual in the university. The Help Desk is organized to support the systems and services DoIT provides to the campus community and other constituencies. Our Help Desk consists of about 80 part time student employees and about 15 full time staff. The DoIT Computer Labs employ about 30 part time student employees and 2 full time staff. The DoIT Help Desk is a 24/7/365 call center that receives about 120,000 calls each year. We provide technical support and answer questions related to the systems and services providing technology for our campus. With such a large student work force, we needed to develop a formal process to involve our best students in the management and ongoing improvement of our operations.

## 2. History

The Student Leadership Project was created three years ago to address the need to formally involve student employees in the management and technical administration of the DoIT Help Desk and Computer Labs. Prior to SLP, our student employees had informal leadership roles within the team they worked on. Along with the informal roles, we held periodic meetings to get feedback

and improvement ideas from all our staff. Though this informal approach was somewhat effective in allowing for individual leadership and getting involvement from student staff, it did not allow us to make full use of the capabilities of our student staff or give them the real experience in leadership and management that we wanted to provide.

In 2000, we began the process of developing a formal project that would address the desire we had to further involve our student staff in the roles discussed above. Initially, our Training and Quality Assurance (QA) Manager looked at the program the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee had in place for their students. Though their student program is very extensive and offers much of what we were looking for, it would not fit how we did IT Support on our campus. Our Training and QA Manager then decided to develop a program in house that would fit our system and address the goals we had specified. Each area in our organization was examined to determine what leadership role a student employee could play. After this process, six positions were identified. Position Descriptions were developed to specify the duties and responsibilities of each position. In the spring of 2001 the Student Leadership Program was announced and the positions were posted. The formal application and hiring process was done later in the spring and early summer. This process included submitting a Cover Letter with Resume and formal interviews with a interview panel. After the selections were made, six student employees began their positions August 1, 2001. Since then, we have created additional positions in the program. The new positions included a Student Technical Manager, and Student-In-training positions for each of the Manager positions. We currently have 10 students in the program.

Each position in the program lasts for one year. It begins June 1<sup>st</sup> and is completed the following May 31<sup>st</sup>. Our goal is to have students in the program participate for 2 complete years. The first year would be in the “In training” position. After successfully completing the “In training” position, they can then apply for the Manager position.

### **3. Organization**

#### **3.1 Management Positions**

Our organization consists of the Help Desk Support Center and two Campus Computer Labs. The six management positions in the SLP are designed to have students be directly involved with, and responsible for, various elements of the management of our operations. The positions consist of 3 Student Managers and 3 Student Managers-in-training. There is a Student Manager and Student Manager-in-training for each of the 2 teams at the Help Desk (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> shift teams), and a Student Manager and Student Manager in Training for the Campus Computer Lab team. Duties these positions are responsible for include: interviewing and hiring students; training, coaching, monitoring, scheduling for 30 to 50 positions, attending and participating in management meetings, attending management training, continuing to do customer service, etc. The Student Managers also are the “eyes, ears and mouth” for the student employees within our organization.

### **3.2 Technical Positions**

Our group manages the Campus Computer Lab’s computers and LAN, as well as the Help Desk computers and LAN. The four technical positions in the SLP are designed to have direct responsibility to administer and manage the technical resources in each of our groups. The positions consist of two Student Technical Managers and two Student Technical Managers-in-Training. Both the Campus Computer Labs and the Help Desk have one of each of the technical positions. The technical manager and the technical manager-in-training have the responsibility for workstation and network management of their respective groups.

### **4. Advantages and Benefits**

- As mentioned earlier, SLP gives our students a formal position in management and real responsibilities managing support operations and computer labs. The technical positions as well are formal positions with real technical administrative responsibilities.
- SLP offers students the opportunity to go through a formal hiring process, including submitting a cover letter and resume, as well as a formal interview with a panel of interviewers.
- SLP improves our organization because it gives a real voice to student employees, bringing in new ideas and perspectives.
- SLP encourages the opening of new lines of communication for our student employees. Many times students feel more comfortable talking with another student for help with issues, technical questions, scheduling questions, or general questions about the DoIT organization.
- SLP allows students to receive valuable experience in the world of IT management.
- SLP has created a career track for a student, employed by our organization.

### **5. Disadvantages and Difficulties**

- Because there is weighty responsibility with these positions, students in the program can feel they need to work many hours during the week. This can distract them from their primary purpose of being on campus, which is attending to their academic studies.
- Though there is no management relationship between the Student Managers and full time employees, there can be some tension in the day to day operations management done by the Student Managers and the effect on the full time employee.
- The most suitable candidates for the program have not always been recruited because of availability and experience.

## **6. Overcoming Disadvantages**

Our SLP participants are each managed by a full time Team Lead. We continue to work diligently to both manage and minimize the disadvantages listed above. Limiting the distraction these positions can be to a student's academic pursuits is done primarily by the Team Lead having periodic discussions about their studies. The Team Lead also attends to the ongoing relationships between full time staff and our SLP students. Issues of recruitment have addressed by long term encouragement of high performance employees to pursue the SLP program.

## **7. Conclusion**

One of the main points of this conference is, "The ACM SIGUCCS Fall 2004 Conference, History in the Making, invites participants to share their experiences, innovations, successes and failures in their support of academic institutions in a climate that is at once amazingly diverse yet financially challenged." The Student Leadership Project has been hugely successful for our organization. It offers the DoIT Helpdesk both a management staff that can directly relate to the issues facing student workers, and a student employee base that can give input on organizational improvements, and create a better workplace for everyone.