

## CASE STUDY

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

### *University of Dayton*

*by Jillian Sandy and Heidi Gauder*

---

#### **Introduction**

The University of Dayton is a private Catholic research university in Dayton, Ohio, that serves around 10,000 graduate and undergraduate students; approximately 90 percent of the undergraduate student population lives on campus. The University Libraries occupy a seven-story building that houses Roesch Library (the main campus library), the Marian Library (a special library and archives), several special collections, exhibit spaces, and our information commons, which is known as the Knowledge Hub. Additionally, the Learning Teaching Center is located on the building's ground floor and, among other services, oversees student writing support for the campus. Although the student employees who offer customer service at the Knowledge Hub report to different campus divisions, we have collaborated to develop service guidelines that all of our student employees learn and demonstrate in their roles at the information commons.

#### **Rationale**

Our service model and training approaches have changed drastically over the last few years, due in large part to a reference room renovation, which allowed us to make space for a writing center and campus technology support. As a result, the former reference desk now functions as an intake desk for research, writing, and technology services; the staff at the desk also provide support for twenty computer workstations and two printers. Not only has it been necessary for our library student employees to receive training that addresses these changes but also for the students employed by the other two departments.

The training we provide writing center and campus technology support student employees is intended to align with our service expectations. We knew that both units offered student employee training, but it was unclear how much customer service training each unit provided. Our underlying service philosophy is that our users expect at least a basic level of service from all employees who staff this intake desk, which we have named the Knowledge Hub desk, regardless of reporting lines. Thankfully, the unit supervisors agree with and support this service philosophy, and their support is a key component to the successful cross-training of Knowledge Hub desk.

#### **Training Areas**

The cross-training content focuses on a couple of broad categories: customer service and library-related tasks. Some of the training opportunities are also set up so that the staff from each unit can get to know staff from other units. The writing center does offer some cross-training, but their services and the technology department's services are specialized, so cross-training training for library student employees is comparatively minimal.

Because the library, writing center, and technology student employees all share the same desk, we expect a base level of customer service, regardless of the question and which student employee is approached. All three units provide some customer service training, so the library focus is on appropriate behavior and emphasizing service values. We expect any student employee to be alert and available for questions, so we explain how laptops, visiting friends, headphones, and full meals at the desk inhibit approachability. We also emphasize professionalism and make it a point to connect this value with the need to wear name badges, remove ball-caps, and keep shoes on their feet. And, because they work at a shared desk with limited workspace, we also point out the need to store their backpacks and coats in a designated area away from the desk. Although the student employees report to three different units, they work within a unified space where approachability and professionalism guide our customer service focus.

In addition to customer service training, the writing center and technology student employees undergo cross-training related to specific library knowledge and functions. Not everyone on the library staff is a librarian, so our training includes a basic overview of the different roles and jobs across the library as well as the library's mission. With this basic grounding and understanding of the library, we believe these student employees will be more effective at answering questions. Our cross-training not only trains student employees from a bigger library perspective but also prepares them for the daily routines at the Knowledge Hub desk and environs. Training includes familiarizing students with the Knowledge Hub layout and spaces (reference collection, photocopiers, visitor computing, technology spaces for group work, librarian offices, staff workroom, etc.) as well as protocols associated with working at the desk. Student employees are taught the opening and closing tasks for the desk workstations, telephone protocols, and how to record the questions they are asked.

In addition to training these student employees on customer service expectations and providing them with a general working knowledge of the library and Knowledge Hub, we also help them understand the differences and limitations in their respective roles. Our student employees, whether affiliated with the library or writing center or technology, are genuinely interested in helping our users, and while we want them to provide assistance, we do not cross-train them in every library aspect. Training also focuses on defining those limitations and explaining when to make referrals.

One task, however, that we do expect all student employees at the Knowledge Hub desk to perform is basic computer and printer troubleshooting. The Knowledge Hub learning commons includes twenty workstations and two printers that are located directly across from the Knowledge Hub desk. Campus printing requires at least two authentications, a process that is not intuitive. We expect any student employee to walk a first-time user through the steps needed to print in addition to being able to fix simple mechanical problems.

Our library Knowledge Hub learning commons is a busy place: our users are seeking research help, writing support, and technology assistance. They are also using public computers and printers to complete a variety of tasks. Given the prominence of the Knowledge Hub desk in the middle of it all, student employees must be prepared to perform a baseline set of tasks in order to effectively and efficiently help our users.

## Training Approaches

To approach cross-training for student employees who work at the information commons, we have used four main tactics: an all-staff meeting including student employees from all departments, small group training targeting specific units, one-on-one sessions, and online training.

Our all-staff meeting serves as a kickoff for the fall and spring semesters, providing a refresher for returning student employees, introducing content to new hires, building team rapport, and setting the tone for the year. While the informational content plays an important role in this meeting, our main focus has been to create an opportunity for student employees to engage in big-picture thinking, reflecting on their respective roles and the ways in which our distinct departments can support each other. We typically provide the group, including students, staff, and faculty, with a prompt to discuss in small teams and then share with the rest of the group. Additionally, we plan an ice breaker activity to provide students with a low-stakes opportunity to work together and get to know one another better; for the fall 2018 semester, we created our own University of Dayton-themed Mad Libs. To help students and staff connect names with faces beyond the meeting, all are asked to contribute to a staff directory used internally. This takes the form of a Google Slides presentation that features pictures, names, and answers to some lighthearted questions about student interests. After trying several approaches to gathering this information, we asked student employees to answer a few questions about themselves and take a selfie during our all-staff meeting in the fall of 2018.

In addition to a large team meeting once per semester, we conduct two or three smaller group training sessions targeting specific departments and training development. Groups with many new hires may receive a brief tour of the information commons. When many of our student employees are returning hires, we are able to build upon existing library knowledge and experiences; in the past, we held a very interactive training in which IT student employees told the group what they know about the library rather than hearing redundant information in a lecture-style session. Regardless of experience level, customer service is a key element of training we continue to review, sharing a document that outlines our guidelines and expectations. We find small group training provides a convenient opportunity to review some of the elements of technical help, especially concerning our rather intimidating printers with many compartments for jams to occur. With small groups, we are able to show students in detail the hardware and software involved in printing as well as share knowledge we have acquired based on trial and error.

Student employees who provide writing and IT support do also receive training and/or review through one-on-one sessions with a staff member. The reinforcement of customer service expectations is our main priority here. We use a checklist to guide these sessions and remain consistent in the material we cover, including items like storage of backpacks and personal belongings, answering and transferring phone calls, and supply locations. Because the student employees from these units work in the library but are paid by departments outside of the library, developing student understanding of the library's values and purpose within the university is another top goal of this training. One-on-one training also gives student employees more time to understand our printing system and how to troubleshoot problems they encounter with it; students can take on a much more hands-on approach to learning printer troubleshooting than they can in other training contexts. Additionally,

we ask students specifically if there are content areas they would like to cover or review. Typically, we as full-time library employees have reflected on these concepts to a greater extent than many of the student employees, so encouraging student employees to follow up on questions they are unsure about is a supplemental goal. Through one-on-one training, we attempt to establish a positive relationship in which student employees can identify at least one staff member to whom they can address questions or concerns.

Finally, we have modified existing online training content for writing and IT student employees on Isidore, the University's LMS built on a Sakai platform. We created one module with five parts that emphasize customer service, recording questions, and making referrals to library staff and faculty. Since customer service is our top training priority, we review an outline of expectations that should by now be very familiar to student employees. Additionally, we describe specific behaviors that will help us meet patron needs, such as understanding the question and prioritizing patrons over socializing or completing homework at the desk. At our service points, we are interested primarily in recording three types of questions using Springshare's LibInsight: reference, directional, and technical. Writing and IT student employees are not expected to answer reference questions, but we do expect them to identify this type of question and make referrals. To complete the modules, students read four sections that either review information previously covered or introduce new content, then complete two quizzes to evaluate comprehension. Questions address areas such as how to approach questions when student employees are unsure of the answer, principles that guide our service model, and identification of questions to answer versus refer to a staff member. In the past, we have also created forum discussions and Google Forms to provide a better picture of student employee learning.

We use multiple techniques for cross-training in order to match the content with the approach as much as possible; for example, training for printer troubleshooting is much more practical when students can gain hands-on experience. In addition to covering informational content, training has served to build teamwork and student employee ownership of their work.

## **Conclusion**

Fortunately, the departments operating within our information commons recognize the need for cross-training in order to provide the best customer service we can, support the growth of our student employees, and build a supportive team. After all-staff meetings, we do ask for feedback such as tactics students found most valuable or would suggest changing; however, we do not assess student employees in other units. Ultimately, our role is to decide which training content is vital for all student employees to succeed at the service desks and to cover this information using a variety of strategies for engagement.

Though our departments remain distinct, we hope to move toward more shared responsibilities. Research team student employees have taken on the role of signing users in to meet with a writing consultant, a task that has previously been completed exclusively by writing center student employees. Additionally, we hope to coordinate IT training that will help research team student employees better provide technical assistance. By working with the other units who are part of the information commons and taking a multi-pronged approach to training, we recognize that our different areas of expertise are valuable, especially when we are willing to teach and learn from each other.