

Student Workers

What Are They Good For?

- ▶ If you are looking for a technical session, I have 10+ previous for this summer at the TTP Website and Micro Focus Technical Insights
- ▶ Please ask questions throughout.
- ▶ At the end of the session there will be time for you to share your own experiences.

“The audience is like a baby duck — it thinks the first thing it sees is its mother.”

—Constance Congdon

Why Do Educational Organizations Hire Student Workers?

▶ Cynical Version:

- ▶ Students have no experience and need it.
- ▶ Students have no money, and want some.
- ▶ Organizations need cheap labor.
- ▶ Financial Aid requirements.
- ▶ Pipeline for preferred workers,

Why Do Educational Organizations Hire Student Workers?

▶ Altruistic Version

- ▶ Working environments are great teachers.
- ▶ Students bring new perspectives.
- ▶ Educational Institutions should practice what they preach.
- ▶ Collaboration across changing groups seeds innovation.
- ▶ Pay-It-Forward

How My District Handles Student Workers

- ▶ Internships are too much paperwork so we hire high school and college students at minimum wage, up to 20 hours per week.
 - ▶ HS students do not work in IT — security.
 - ▶ Hours tracked by time clock.
- ▶ There is a budget for student workers doled out to IT Depts.
 - ▶ Right now IT has a maximum of 3.
- ▶ Student workers are badged and in the regular HR flow.
 - ▶ Must be enrolled in college.

Student Workers in Systems Integration

- ▶ In IT, Student Workers fall under Systems Integration (i.e. me) but are available for short and long term projects for any part of IT.
- ▶ We give them a MacBook Air for office use.
- ▶ Work out of my office.
- ▶ Officially on a semester-by-semester basis but usually stay until they graduate or another opportunity presents itself.
- ▶ By default, keep things informal until a need for a formal procedure or something that should never be informal.

Setting Career Expectations

- ▶ Do not ask student workers to get coffee.
 - ▶ This is a hard and fast rule, and the reason they are not under Sean Griffith.
 - ▶ More specifically, do not impose artificial hierarchy on student workers.
 - ▶ In IT, order must be backed by utility and necessity
- ▶ Do puncture myths about IT Careers.
 - ▶ High pay and fabulous perks are part of the media narrative.
 - ▶ Dissuade students from these myths without crushing their spirits.

What Kind of Work Should Student Workers Do?

- ▶ It should be something “real” — fulfill a real need that you have and whose effect can ultimately be seen.
- ▶ It should be a mix of “grunt work” and “inspiration” — hopefully in the same task.
 - ▶ See next slide.
- ▶ It should mostly align to their stated career interests with smaller projects outside their comfort level.
- ▶ Students should not be given time sensitive work unless it can be completed in a matter of hours by anyone.
 - ▶ Their schedules are erratic and they take longer on unexpected things.

Grunt Work and Inspiration

- ▶ It should be a mix of “grunt work” and “inspiration” — hopefully in the same task.
 - ▶ Every job has “grunt work” that is not fun but is necessary.
 - ▶ There should be enough of this work that the student understands the necessity and expectation of it.
 - ▶ They should also learn that sometimes a happy career consists of picking a subspecialty whose grunt work they mind least.
 - ▶ In my own exalted position, I find myself doing more Java KeyStore troubleshooting than is healthy for anyone.
 - ▶ “Inspirational” work should allow the student to think, have joy, and play.
 - ▶ Anything where they get to design (in any way) parts of a project from scratch.
 - ▶ Some students actually need to be pushed into this work because they just want well-defined tasks.

Supervising Student Workers

- ▶ Keep them on-task but cut them some slack for homework.
 - ▶ I have had some of those same professors.
- ▶ There is a balance between micro-managing (and taking away from your own, more expensive hourly time) and letting them go feral (where they feel neglected and start using brain-damaging social media).
 - ▶ My current balance is to spend concentrated amounts of time early in a project and then let them loose for a while with the understanding that they should come to me with questions. Then we do periodic progress and adjustment check-ins.
- ▶ Show them “the right way” to approach a technical task out of the gate.
- ▶ Insist on hearing and considering their full opinion but make it clear that any conclusion needs supporting explanation until it hits “bedrock”
 - ▶ There are too many IT workers in the world who cannot back up their approach.
- ▶ Explain enough to clear up potential misunderstandings and make no assumptions.
- ▶ Write down anything that could be vague or which they might need to refer to later.

Mentoring Student Workers

- ▶ One person's "Professionals do it this way," is another person's "No professional would ever do it like that and you'll get fired if you do."
 - ▶ See "Quark vs. PageMaker" and ANYTHING in Theatre.
 - ▶ Set the expectation that they will learn one set of best and worst practices in your environment and that they should take that toolset and ADD to it at their next job — that job will look like an alien world but their way is neither worse nor better, just another set of tools to add to the box.
- ▶ Give them what they need to expand their strengths and develop strategies to limit their weaknesses.
- ▶ Talk to them about what they THINK their career will be like and encourage them to observe.
 - ▶ The audience likes you more if you show them $2 + 3$ but let them figure out 5.
 - ▶ They should be thinking about what their life will be like when they are 50.
- ▶ Be friendly, be kind, be demanding, set professional boundaries, and let them figure out how far out of their shell they want to come.
- ▶ Let them know early on that you expect they will go on to "bigger and better" things and to involve you in that process — writing recommendations, giving advice, keeping your eye out for opportunities.
- ▶ Do not show favorites, but tailor your approach for each student.
- ▶ Ask about coursework and synchronize with tasks if possible.

Project Successes and Failures

▶ Failures

- ▶ Research to present me with knowledge about technical products.
 - ▶ Hard to explain the shape of the end result and hard to give me the level of detail and thought I need.
- ▶ Overhauling iPrint
 - ▶ Requires too many domains of knowledge and server access.
 - ▶ I am going to have another crack at this.

▶ Successes

- ▶ Programming full-stack applications (with starter code and reference books).
- ▶ Documentation
- ▶ Updating information.
- ▶ Reaching out to stakeholders over multiple groups (for different projects)
- ▶ Setting up network equipment.

▶ What About?

- ▶ Student workers in schools have more experience doing workstation and hardware troubleshooting.

Student Worker Stats

- ▶ We have had about 11 student workers.
- ▶ Diverse in age, gender, race, and life experience.
- ▶ Currently 2 employed (will be 3 by end of August)
- ▶ All previous workers left voluntarily (or graduated) and found employment in IT.
- ▶ 6 hired by District in other IT groups (which are very happy with them)

*Share Your Own
Experiences*