

Maximizing Your Resources: Working Effectively With Student Employees

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1. Introduction

In a time of downsizing, many of us are faced with the challenge of doing more with less. Women in Engineering Programs know this challenge all too well. Most of us operate with bare bones budgets and very small staffs. In order to maximize our resources, the Office of Women's Programs (OWP) at Stevens Institute of Technology has designed and implemented a student employee program. Before I describe this program in further detail, I'd like to provide you with some information about Stevens and OWP.

About Stevens

Stevens is a small, private, competitive, urban, technical college located in Hoboken, N.J. Our undergraduate enrollment is about 1,400 undergraduates (20% female) and 2,000 graduate students. Stevens offers bachelor's master's and doctoral degrees in engineering, science, computer science and management and a bachelor's degree in the humanities and liberal arts. Stevens has many college work study positions for our undergraduates funded by our Financial Aid Office. Some departments opt to pay students through their grants or other budgets.

About the Office of Women's Programs

The OWP was established in 1978 to increase the number of women in engineering and science. Most of our programs are targeted to pre-college students. Each year we offer four one day engineering and science career seminars, conduct high school visits and a national summer program.

We also offer programs for our undergraduate and graduate students. These programs include a Freshmen Women's Luncheon, academic and personal counseling and referrals, an electronic scholarship database, a career literature library and a Women's Seminar Series. OWP also serves as advisor to Stevens student chapter of the Society of Women Engineers.

OWP is the Eastern Regional Center for WEPAN. As such, we conduct an annual regional training seminar and develop and publish several publications each year to assist other institutions expand or initiate their own women in engineering program.



OWP Staff

Our office consists of two full-time professionals and one full-time administrative assistant.

As Associate Director, part of my responsibilities include supervising our college work study students or as we refer to them, program assistants. We usually employ anywhere from four to five students per semester. About six students work with us over the summer to assist with the coordination of our national summer program. In the past, we have also hired a part-time graduate assistant who was paid through grant moneys or funded in part by Stevens graduate office.

II. OWP's Student Employee Program

Because our staff is small, we have made an effort to utilize our student staff members as much as possible. With the help of our students, we have been able to expand our programs due to the extra support they provide us with. This partnership is not only beneficial to us, but also to our students. By providing them with a meaningful work experience, we extend their education to outside the classroom. Later on, I will discuss the benefits to you and the students in greater detail.

Student Orientation Program

When a student is hired to work with OWP, she participates in a brief orientation seminar which is conducted by myself and lasts for approximately thirty minutes. This orientation is described in the ***Student Program Guide***. I'll highlight some basic components of the guide.

Before her orientation, each student is given the ***Student Program Guide*** and some literature about our programs. She is asked to read over this material on her own, before the actual orientation. During the orientation, I highlight some of OWP's major activities, goals, mission, etc.. After this, I discuss our department's expectations of our student employees. We have found it very helpful to be direct and tell students up front what we expect of them. Our students are requested to be on time to work, to phone ahead when they will be more than ten minutes late, to adhere to their work schedule, etc. We believe that this training is an important part of their professional development and helps our students develop good time management skills.



Projects Assigned To Student Employees

Our program assistants are involved in a number of diversified activities. Usually, new student employees will start off performing general office duties. As students progress and become more familiar with our department, they become more involved with helping us design and coordinate our programs. Some of the projects students engage in include:

- * *For our on-campus pre-college programs: speakers, instructors, lab assistants, tour guides and resident assistants*
- * *Newsletter writers*
- * *Assist with coordination of all of our programs (e.g. for conferences- registering participants)*
- * *Designing brochures*
- * *Computer work (e.g. databases, letters, etc.)*
- * *Exposure to national conferences: work at conference, give papers*

Each student employee has a "work bin". Their projects and assignments are placed in this bin so that they always have something to do, even if myself or our director is not in. This has worked really well for us and students appreciate the fact that we take them seriously and plan ahead of time, so they almost always have something to do.

Student Employee Rewards & Incentives

We reward students for their efforts by offering them flexibility in where they work (e.g. some students work at home or in their dorm room during the evening and weekends). Because we have limited office space, having students work from their home or dorm room has really helped alleviate overcrowding in our department.

Students may choose flexible work hours, especially during mid-terms and final exams. Some students work fewer hours and others opt not to work at all during mid-term and finals. Students who have worked with us for a fairly lengthy period of time, are invited to participate in the WEPAN Women in Engineering National Conference. We cover the costs associated with the conference. Occasionally, students present papers at the conference and they work at the conference and help the conference committee with registration, etc.

III. The Benefits of Utilizing Student Employees to You and Your Office.

Next, I'd like to discuss the benefits to your office of using student employees:

Supplements your staff

Implementing a student employee program really makes sense in a time when academia, like industry is downsizing. Student employees are a valuable addition to a women in engineering program, since most are understaffed.

Provides staff with assistance in performing repetitive tasks

For example, students perform repetitive tasks such as inputting information on databases, typing, filing, telephone answering, etc.

Increases Your Department's Productivity

Because your student staff can focus on repetitive tasks, your professional staff are free to focus on additional projects.

Opportunity to Obtain Student Input

Your student employees can give you input that will help you tailor your programs so that they are truly geared to your undergraduate and/or graduate women.

Increases Student Attendance and Participation in Your Programs

If you conduct programs for undergraduate and/or graduate women, and you solicit their help in designing and coordinating the program, this will definitely help boost their attendance and participation in your programs (e.g. they tell their friends and encourage them to participate). Remember, people support that which they help create!

Keeps You Informed

Your student employees will help keep you informed about current student concerns and issues on your campus.

IV. Benefits to Student Employees Who Work With Women In Engineering Programs

In addition to the monetary compensation students will receive, they will also reap several benefits by working in your office.

Provides them with a meaningful work experience

When students engage in general office duties, they will become familiar with how an office should run. Their work experience will also teach them about event planning and programming.



Enhances their professional development and helps them develop the following skills:

- Time management
- How to work effectively with others - teamwork
- Leadership skills
- Effective communication skills
- Public speaking skills

Retention Tool

Studies indicate that students who work on campus are better retained than those who do not. Interacting with different offices on campus, helps students establish relationships with other staff and faculty. It also gives them a better idea of how the university runs and who are the appropriate people to contact to get their questions answered and problems resolved.

Students will appreciate the personal support you and your staff members can offer them, especially when it comes to stressful times for them, like getting through their freshmen year and midterms and finals.

Establish industry contacts and develop networking skills

If students work on projects that require them to interact with industry, this enables them to network with professionals in the field. Such contacts can lead to mentoring relationships, additional sources of encouragement and support as well as potential jobs.

V. How to Develop Your Own Student Employee Program

How can I fund or pay student employees?

Investigate your options!:

- Financial aid office (college work study)
- Grants, other budgets
- Share a student with another office (e.g. Student Affairs or Student Development Office)
- Graduate school

Recruiting & hiring student employees

Advertise in high profile areas:

- Student newspaper

- Internet

- Posters/flyers

Conduct interviews

Conduct an orientation

Provide them with a "work bin" and a comfortable area to work in

Help them prioritize

Perform follow-up on a regular basis

Provide ongoing feedback and evaluation

Give incentives and rewards

Take the time to find out what type of work your student employees enjoy doing and what they are best at and try to tailor their assignments to these interests if possible. For example, some students like number crunching so they may enjoy tallying evaluations and summarizing data. Other students enjoy writing, so they may want to be writers for newsletters. Students interested in developing their management skills can be offered the opportunity to manage other program assistants. Some students like to utilize their creative abilities by helping you market programs and designing brochures.

VI. What type of projects are best suited for students?

Clerical tasks

Newsletters--conduct interviews, write articles

Data reports--summarize program evaluations

Speakers

Tour guides

Lab instructors/assistants

Design brochures

Gather research materials

Help organize conferences, seminars, etc.....

Resident Assistants for summer programs



VII. Helpful Hints For Working With Your Own Student Employees:

Remember to give praise on a regular basis.

Don't assign projects that you have not fully developed or those without clear goals.

Always provide clear instructions.

Take them and their work seriously.

Don't expect too much or give them too much work. This will give them additional undue pressure which could interfere with their academics.

Avoid scheduling major projects or programs which require alot of student assistance near midterms or finals--chances are, students will not be able to work as much or at all during these high stress times.

