



National Network of Law School Officers

Educating and developing all law school officers

2013 AACRAO Annual Meeting

NNLSO Session Recap: “Creative Staffing: Utilizing Part-Time, Work Study & Other Resources in Law School Administration”

By Darcee Espelien



Creative Staffing: Carol Rachwald, Sarah Reed, and Tricia Pearson present their insights into maximizing staffing resources.

Whether or not your law school is tightening the fiscal belt these days, a second look at your staffing and procedural practices may yield benefits that go beyond the financial. In their presentation entitled, “Creative Staffing: Utilizing Part-Time, Work Study & Other Resources in Law School Administration,” presenters Tricia Pearson, Associate Registrar at Seattle University School of Law, Carol Rachwald, Registrar at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, and Sarah Reed, Registrar at the University of San Francisco, School of Law, offered some ideas on finding inventive ways to optimize the resources you probably already have.

Effectively Selecting, Training and Managing Your Student Workers

When screening for new additions to your work-study labor force, you’ll want to identify which candidates have a strong grasp on the importance of customer service. Some administrators find that law students are the best picks for work-study positions because they have a vested interest in the program and can relate to other law students who approach the office with questions. Other administrators find that law students are not ideal candidates because they view the positions as internships, rather than actual jobs, and do not take it seriously. Whatever your personal philosophy, try to gravitate toward applicants who are in the best position to commit (hopefully long-term) to the job.

After you have selected your student workers, it is important to invest early in their training. They must immediately learn about and sign off on FERPA standards before handling records, and they must recognize the gravity of violating these standards as employees of the law school. They may lack professional work experience, and—quite rightly—prioritize their studies over work, so it is important to establish your expectations for them and ensure they have an understanding of their duties right away. Training materials—such as task checklists and wikis outlining procedures—may be kept and updated by current student workers for use by new-hires.



National Network *of* Law School Officers

Educating and developing all law school officers

You may find that you have very little time to formally evaluate your work-study students, but informal check-ins work very well for keeping them on track, getting their feedback on office functions, and discussing methods for improvement. Provide your student workers with a solid grasp of where their job descriptions begin and end, and address problem behavior immediately. If you involve them in staff meetings, departmental celebrations and project planning, they will probably feel more connected to your team's goals. Ultimately, it is up to you as a leader to model behaviors you would like for them to exhibit.

Which projects are appropriate for your work-study students? That depends on how much access to sensitive data you want them to have, as well as what should really be taken care of by your staff. Tasks such as data entry, proofing schedules, fact-checking, light front-desk or phone duties, organizing, filing, and scanning old records into databases are great projects for work-study students. This frees up your staff to focus on more complex or sensitive work. Consider keeping an Excel document or some other means of documentation that lists everyone's assignments and their corresponding deadlines. This will keep everyone on track and prevent your staff from assigning inappropriate tasks to the student workers. Staff should feel empowered to help train students and act as point persons for them, which offers you some relief.

Reconfigure Your Office Labor

In addition to hiring exceptional work-study students (or as an alternative to hiring them), there are other methods for improving the workflow in your office. Figure out when you have the most traffic, and staff accordingly. This may involve changing your hours of operation, staggering staff schedules to optimize output and student-worker training and supervision, or converting one or more staff members from full-time to part-time.

You may also determine that you need to retrain your team to meet your service expectations. This may be especially true if you came into your position with a staff that you did not hire or train. You and your employees can work together to create detailed work-duty timelines for each position (be sure to include one-off projects and deadlines). This will help to align the staff with departmental goals, which they can help build on, as well as identify overburdened staff members or gaps in processes. Simultaneously, cross-train your employees so that you have maximized office coverage. Follow up regularly with collaborative departmental meetings, during which everyone is encouraged to contribute their ideas.

Tying it all Together

There are numerous ways for you and your employees to evaluate your workflow, staffing and productivity, and even more ways to improve them. By hiring the best labor possible and remaining actively involved in everyone's training and progress, you are demonstrating to them and to the law school community that yours is an ever-evolving, ever-improving department. Such flexibility is key to successfully improving productivity and, ultimately, optimally serving your constituents.