

## **TIGERS GRANT FINAL REPORT STUDENT ASSISTANTS: MINING CALIFORNIA'S GOLD**

The project goal was to conduct research with the CSU Information and Instructional Technology departments, particularly the CSU CATS members. The objective was to gather information regarding how student assistants were being used to meet the needs of delivering IT in higher education, especially during times of financial downsizing.

The majority of the research time was spent contacting CSU CATS and CSU IT staff to get information with which to form a survey. Having sent a query to the CATS list and individual email addresses within CSU, it was determined that the greatest interest, initially, was with regard to how student assistant positions are created and how students get hired. As well, the initial raw responses revealed that the majority of the respondents had no official method of recruiting, hiring, training, or retaining student assistants. Based on the initial query, the survey of 13 questions was prepared and mailed. This survey went to all CATS list members with the possibility of 23 campuses responding. From the 23 campuses, I received 23 responses, however, only 14 individual campuses responded. The results of this survey were presented in an HorizonLive! session in November 2002.

The presentation/workshop was conducted with an initial login of 20+ participants, however, shortly after the session began, the participants dropped quickly down to 4. When asked why people logged off, the most common response was that it was a voice stream with web data. They'd expected a video-conference style presentation/workshop. Still, those who remained participated and asked questions about the data. The survey data was revisited at the CATS 2003 conference.

A good faith effort was put forth to get regional campuses to sponsor a workshop, however, no takers were found. Though the regional idea didn't pan out, the participation at the CATS Conference seemed to get the ideal people in the same room at the same time to discuss. What was learned from the survey, overall, was that there is no standard for hiring student assistants within CSU, and that very few of the departments who hired student assistants really knew how to manage them with regard to promotion, retention, and training. This was the most interesting part of the survey for me. This survey issue also was a good topic for conversation at the conference workshops.

### ***What Did We Learn?***

The most valuable pieces of information which were identified and shared via email and at the conference were:

#### **How do you create a position for a student assistant?**

- Create a position description for the position listing duties and responsibilities.
- Fill out and process your campuses version of the Student Employee Action Form (SEAF)
- Get funding approval from department administrators.

#### **What type of information is contained in a relevant job description?**

- List the types of duties the student assistant will perform.
- Describe in general detail what responsibilities the student will have and who will supervise them.
- You also list the rate of pay and the duration of the position. (sample descriptions were provided and uploaded to MERLOT)

## **How do you screen and hire students once the position is created and funded?**

- Applications and interviews
- Peer referral
- Performance based screening tests

## **How do you get funding?**

- Work Study
- Grants
- Department budget
- Volunteer workers

## ***What Did We Accomplish?***

Overall, the grant funded research, travel, and workshop delivery. Research took more time than anticipated. I created and distributed the survey in house. However, this process took more time and effort than I expected. Should I undertake such a venture in the future, I would definitely utilize the services of CUDA and their survey tools. Nonetheless, the process was necessary to be able to realize the value of a canned survey and a clearing house from which the survey is collated and reported.

Travel was limited to an unofficial visit to CSU Humboldt, SFSU, and CSU, Chico. Much of it was done from Friday to Sunday. I visited several of the campus labs and spoke with some of the student workers in the facility. No contact with the management was made other than the survey and the conference. The primary purpose of the visit was to see how the students worked and what they did. Based on the visits and the electronic survey, I found that only 1 campus had a program in place where the student assistants supervised and managed each other in a student leadership structure. That campus was my own, CSU, Hayward.

By sharing the findings with other ITC staff in positions similar to mine, I recognized an opportunity to distribute my STSC leadership model.

Other accomplishments included helping my campus Finance and Executive Branch become more familiar with receiving grants for technology staff, and understanding how EXEMPT IT staff hours and grant research can be accomplished without creating a fiscal nightmare. I was directed to become a Special Consultant to work under the grant. I was required to conduct the research and travel during my off hours. I was able to complete the work in a timely manner; however, billing for the hours became a very interesting opportunity for learning. Some documents were lost when the host device crashed and could not recover sectors. However, efforts are still under way to retrieve data from backups. Based on the incidents and opportunities I encountered, I highly recommend that grant materials and data be stored on CATS-MERLOT as they are created, so as not to be lost. This also ensures that data will be posted and available in a more timely manner while removing the factor of local hardware failure or infection, as happened in my case.

## ***How Could I Have Been More Successful?***

Overall, I feel that I accomplished the goals of the grant as best I could with the challenges and opportunities with which I was presented. I would write the grant with better detail regarding what I wished to accomplish and establish more realistic deliverables. I would make sure that even though

the executives signed off that they were fully cognizant of what IT staff workload balancing requires when working on secondary or tertiary projects. As well, I would work more closely with campus Research and Sponsored Programs to administer the grant and help ensure that the necessary administrative support was in place to make accomplishing the goals more pleasurable and attainable.

As well, I would use what I learned from this, my first grant endeavor, to really get to the heart of the matter. The information exchange between the IT staff interested in this subject was well worth the stress and effort of even attempting to comply with and to reach the goals of the grant request I submitted.

I feel that I was not as successful as I could have been in reaching the goals of the grant. I feel this is largely due to the fact that I participated in two grant projects; was assigned a new department (Distance Learning) just after I applied for the grant; and the since my Student Technology Leadership program was short of staff, I just did not have enough time. I also feel that if the grant period were a few months longer, I could have better managed my time.

If asked to undertake such a venture in the future, I would have to say yes. Although, now, I realize how much time and dedication is really necessary to accomplish such a project. The scope seemed to widen as I got more information. However, I would prefer to undertake such a “research and presentation” project with a partner. Based upon my survey and presentations, I have been approached by CSULA, SFSU, CSU Chico, and CSU Hayward to participate at a later date in working with IT staff to tailor a program to their specific IT needs.

#### *Where Would I Like to See the Project go?*

Ideally, this is a big idea with great potential. There is great need in CSU for student assistants to fill the void where IT staff are not being replaced. As well, workshop/session participants expressed interest in establishing system-wide criteria for recruiting, training and maintaining student assistants.

Further, based upon the initial survey, and the greater participation at the conference, it is clear that the resources and the expertise exist to create such a system-wide “guideline” for establishing a successful IT student assistant (ITSA?) program at each campus. Currently, my efforts have been recruited to help other departments on my campus establish a tiered-leadership program.

#### *Final Thoughts:*

Student Assistants are the only way IT staff can meet the demands for the need of Instructional and Information Technology. Student Assistants are our future IT workers and we should take the opportunity to train them to the best standards possible and also give them skills outside IT such as leadership, peer counseling, performance evaluation, workshop presentation, and organizational management. We have the rare opportunity of building our future workforce to meet the specific needs of Higher Educational technology. Let us take the opportunity to create a CSU wide IT Student Assistant program.