

## **CAUSE98 User Services Constituent Group Meeting**

December 9, 1998 4:30-6:00 PM

Conveners: Carolyn Livingston, Tufts University

Tracy Scharer, University of Virginia

One of the best things about people in User Services is the way they love to share information. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting. They represented institutions of all sizes and countries all over the world.

We opened the meeting by introducing ourselves and telling of a success or challenge on the job. Some of the successes, just briefly mentioned, include:

- Created \$60,000 training facility
- Hired a full time technical trainer
- Turned 6 positions to colleges for truly distributed support
- Built several small specialized support groups
- Established support level agreements
- Gained the ability to "manage about anything."

The challenges mentioned became the basis for the discussion that followed.

### **Hiring and Retaining Staff**

With trained technical people lured by higher salaries in private industry, most people reported that they were loosing staff and finding it hard to hire new staff. At Southern Oregon University the solution was to hire student workers and give them technical and customer service training. Offers of full time work and full tuition went to the best third year students. This plan provides trained staff who stay at least two years. Those students who do leave after graduation have had excellent job offers. University of Washington reports a 100% track record for student recruits getting jobs after graduation. Duke University has a yearly training budget of \$4,000 per person. Not only does it "give staff the power to make changes," it minimizes turnover. Some people even came back from industry jobs. This reinforces the idea that people like jobs in the academic environment.

### **Distributed Computing Support**

Some form of distributed support is in every school. Everyone agreed it is essential to have technical staff in the departments. There are a variety of ways to achieve this. Locate IT staff in departments, train existing departmental staff, transfer positions from IT to departments, and have the IT department train and manage student workers for the departments. NYU notes staff resistance to reporting to two bosses (computing and department). At Southwest Missouri State University there is an agreement with departments to pay all the technical people the same rate. University of Virginia offers a Computer Survival Skills course to enable departmental staff members to provide first level support.

### **Training**

The discussion centered on training faculty. Everyone agreed that faculty members prefer one-on-one training. One school hired a trainer to provide this service because their faculty members did not want student trainers while other schools successfully used students to train faculty.

### **Help Desk**

A few years ago we thought the help desk could do it all. Now there are many innovative ways of sharing the

responsibility. They range from the help desk acting as receptionist and referring calls to help desks that complete 80% of the calls and to the idea of a "virtual help desk." Southern Oregon University emphasizes customer service, the issue of ownership and follow-up on help desk calls. Several schools noted the importance of teaching and stressing customer service along with continual technical training. Duke University provides a virtual help desk is a web page with numerous links to special areas.

*[www.dunk.duke.edu](http://www.dunk.duke.edu)*

*[www.philverghis.com/helpdeskfaq.html](http://www.philverghis.com/helpdeskfaq.html)*

### **Standards and Service Level Agreements**

Everyone agreed that having hardware and software standards would help improve support. Problems come with the rapid changes in the hardware market and resistance from customers. Generally hardware is the easiest piece of the problem. Bradley University does not have a single standard, but rather a minimum set of standards, and has been "committee-ing it for a year." Tufts University has quarterly meetings on standards and publishes updates from that committee: *[www.library.tufts.edu/standards/standards.html](http://www.library.tufts.edu/standards/standards.html)*.

Indiana State University seeks agreement from the community to limit supported things. "Good support requires limiting what will be supported." Service Level Agreements with customers are a way to manage expectations. Duke has information about their SLAs online:

*[www.dunk.duke.edu](http://www.dunk.duke.edu)*

Then go to "About Dunk" and click on the link for SLA (in pdf format).

### **Constituent Group Future**

Time prohibited a lengthy discussion, but there was unanimous agreement to continue holding User Services group meetings. The User Services meetings are a valuable opportunity to meet colleagues from other institutions and exchange ideas.

Thanks to all who attended and made the User Services meeting so dynamic. It was great to see many people continuing the discussion even after the end of the meeting. There was a request not to schedule User Services at the same time as the Small Colleges constituent group. Please let the conveners know of other conflicts to consider in scheduling the meeting next year.