

# Students As Managers Of Campus- Based Volunteer Programs

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ON MANY CAMPUSES, a part-time professional staff is unable to direct and manage a large volunteer program without student help. When I was the director of the student volunteer program at Florida Technological University in Orlando, Florida, I was also responsible for the university's film and lecture series. As my time was limited, I had to develop some capable student managers to assist me in administering the student volunteer program.

Student managers who have moved up within the administrative structure of the volunteer program are involved in every phase of program planning and implementation. They often serve as role models for other students. For example, during recruiting drives, nothing "sells" the value of volunteering to new students better than hearing first-hand the personal testimonies of experienced, committed student volunteers about the en-

joyment and satisfaction they gained from their work.

Student managers are persuasive spokespersons, not only with the student body but also with others, both on and off campus. For example, the participation of student managers in the planning, operation, and evaluation of your program demonstrates student interest and support to university administrators. For community agencies receiving the services of university volunteers, student managers provide a system of ongoing, personal communication between the campus and the agency. Each student manager is assigned to an agency director and serves as the university contact person for that agency. This system helps the agency to resolve volunteer/agency problems before they become crises and, at the same time, it builds up the confidence of agency personnel in the reliability of students.

For students, managerial roles provide opportunities to develop skills which will help them later on in their careers. Student managers gain experience, self-confidence, and organizational skills as they work with agency directors on negotiating volunteer jobs, placement, follow-up, and evaluation of student volunteers. They also develop useful administrative skills by planning orientation and training workshops.

Finally, while the professional director is usually looked upon as the person who provides continuity for a campus volunteer program, there are times when student managers provide that continuity. An example is an interim period when the position of paid director is unfilled. Some large student volunteer programs, such as the Clearing House at the University of Colorado at Boulder or Phillips Brooks House at Harvard University, have never had the luxury of full-time professional directors and rely entirely upon student managers to administer their programs.

## Pyramid Structure

The development of a work force of capable student managers requires an organizational structure with several distinct management levels, each with its own job description (see Figures 1–3). There are advantages to a pyramid-type structure that divides the management of the program into different levels of responsibility that can be delegated to individual student leaders. Three easily identifiable levels are: (1) involvement in overall program management (2) involvement with a group of agencies working in a single field (e.g., health) and (3) involvement limited to a single agency.

Students are motivated to assume increasingly larger responsibilities as they move up through the managerial ranks of this pyramid structure. They are also motivated by the opportunity to practice their managerial skills and to learn new ones.

While I was on the staff of Florida Technological University, we used this kind of pyramid structure and I think the model is a sound one. At the top of the student management pyramid are two students, known as

“Co-Chairpersons,” who work closely with the director and who are involved in the overall administration of the student volunteer program. These Co-Chairpersons are responsible for directing the other student managers. They meet regularly with the director to discuss program operations, the development of student managers, and campus and community public relations. They also represent the volunteer program at meetings of faculty, administrators, or agency personnel. They visit classes to explain to students the Academic Option, in which students can elect to do volunteer work in lieu of a specific assignment for credit, such as writing a paper.

In addition, Co-Chairpersons prepare agendas and chair weekly staff meetings. Every quarter they plan a campus-wide “Agency Night” designed to recruit and inform students about volunteer job possibilities.

A second or middle level of student managers, called “Area Coordinators,” are closely involved with a group of agencies in the same field, such as youth, education, or health. These Area Coordinators assist the director and Co-Chairpersons in staffing the student volunteer

office, and they handle various office procedures that directly affect student volunteers.

A third level of student managers, called “Key Volunteers,” represent the campus volunteer program to a single agency. Key Volunteers work closely with the agency director of volunteers to monitor the relationship between that agency and the students who volunteer their services. They participate in that agency’s orientation and training of volunteers, and they are encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement of the program.

### Management Functions

According to Harold Koontz and Cyril O’Donnell in *Principles of Management*, the most commonly accepted managerial roles are: staffing, planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating. Student managers, if they are to be effective, must be involved in each of these five management functions.

Staffing is the process of determining who will work at which level of management. This means recruiting, selecting, training, promoting, and, if necessary, discharging student leaders from management positions.

As openings arise, the names of prospective candidates for student manager positions are submitted by current student managers or student volunteers. The selection process involves an interview with the director, Co-Chairpersons, or Area Coordinators, depending upon the level of the position to be filled.

Student managers must have specific personal characteristics. These are: (1) maturity and the ability to solve problems creatively, (2) ability to communicate effectively and to work with a group, (3) belief in the concept of volunteerism and an understanding of the goals of the campus program, (4) ability to set personal limits for volunteer commitment, studies, and outside employment, and (5) no major academic problems.

During the selection interview, when these personal characteristics are assessed, candidates are informed of the time commitment required for the position. Each student manager must serve at least one year. Also, prior to beginning a new assignment, each student manager is given a copy of a pamphlet outlining all job descriptions for student managers (see Figures 1–3).

Training must be provided for all student managers, and it should be appropriate for the particular level of responsibility. Training is a three-step process coordinated by the director and Co-Chairpersons. New Co-Chairpersons and Area Coordinators attend a four to five-hour pre-service training session. During this session, they receive an overview of the program’s operations and gain practice in communication skills.

The overview briefing includes:

- Information on all aspects of working with agencies (filing systems, categories of agencies, job descriptions, communication procedures, etc.)
- An explanation of the volunteer program structure, using an organization chart

**Figure 1**

#### **JOB DESCRIPTION—CO-CHAIRPERSON**

Eligibility: Must have worked for at least six months as an Area Coordinator.

Duties:

1. Assists the Director with the overall administration of the volunteer program.
2. Directs the Area Coordinators who man volunteer office; directs other procedures related to volunteer placements.
3. Assists Area Coordinators in solving agency/volunteer problems.
4. Assists the Director in recruiting, interviewing, and selecting students for management positions of Area Coordinator and Key Volunteer.
5. Represents the volunteer program at university or community functions and on committees.
6. Chairs weekly staff meetings.
7. Assists the Director in developing and presenting pre-service training for new student managers.
8. Gives presentations on the program to college administrators, faculty members, and community agencies. Makes presentations to clubs, organizations, and academic classes on campus.
9. Assists the Director in preparing the annual program budget.
10. Coordinates the public relations campaign for the volunteer program with Area Coordinators.
11. Assists the Director in coordinating the Academic Option program; directs Area Coordinators who interview, place, and evaluate Academic Option students.

- Discussion of responsibilities to student volunteers (placements, follow-up, evaluations, recognition awards)
- A briefing on office procedures (interviewing prospective student volunteers, location of files for volunteers and agencies, resource library and in-house communications)

- A step-by-step explanation of the procedure for awarding academic credit for volunteer work.

All of this information is on file in the volunteer office in a “policies and procedures” manual, which also includes the history, budget, membership and public relations aspects of the program.

During pre-service training, new student managers have a chance to practice their communication skills. For example, they role play interviews with prospective volunteers. By practicing listening skills, student managers learn the importance of nonverbal or body language. They become attuned to the need to ask non-threatening, open-ended questions to elicit information when interviewing students or agency personnel.

During the second phase of training, each new Area Coordinator is teamed with an experienced student manager for on-the-job training. This “buddy system” helps new student managers to learn from experienced peers. On-the-job training includes office filing, interviewing and placing students, visiting agencies, follow-up phone calls, and problem-solving.

Area Coordinators orient Key Volunteers to the program structure and procedures. Each year, these Key Volunteers receive special training in communication skills. They also participate in on-site training offered at their agencies.

### Planning

Planning is a fundamental concern of every manager. All student managers should be involved in any plans that directly affect their work. Any changes in the program’s long-range goals, for example, should be discussed by the director, Co-Chairpersons, and Area Coordinators. The inclusion of student managers in planning insures their commitment to shared goals and motivates them to work as a management team.

In addition, systematic planning helps student managers to present the volunteer program to university administrators or to agency personnel. The importance of a systematic approach to planning becomes apparent when the director is confronted with 10 or more excited student managers, each with a different idea.

To sustain student enthusiasm and interest, try to complete your planning session in one or two meetings. Every student manager should be encouraged to offer his or her ideas. If your program has a large number of Key Volunteers, it is best to have them send suggestions in writing to the Co-Chairpersons. After a final list of goals and objectives has been established, remember that it should remain flexible enough to adjust to changes in the volunteer program.

**Figure 2**

### **JOB DESCRIPTION—AREA COORDINATOR**

Eligibility: Must have worked for at least six months as a Key Volunteer or volunteer-at-large.

Duties:

1. Coordinates the activities of student volunteers in one group of agencies (e.g., health agencies).
2. Maintains accurate job descriptions for positions in assigned agencies by means of correspondence and personal visits.
3. Negotiates new volunteer jobs with directors of agencies in assigned program area.
4. Handles volunteer/agency concerns or problems and serves as the agency’s contact person at the university.
5. Maintains close communications with Key Volunteers in their area.
6. Presents a pre-service orientation for each Key Volunteer, outlining the purposes, goals, and objectives of the program and of the particular volunteer job.
7. Recruits and interviews students for Key Volunteer management positions.
8. Works in the volunteer office at least five hours per week. Provides information, arranges placements, conducts evaluations, and generally services student volunteers.
9. Facilitates the office procedures for the Academic Option program.
10. Makes presentations about the Academic Option program to classes.
11. Attends weekly staff meetings and reports on agencies and volunteers in assigned program area.
12. Assists the Co-Chairpersons with volunteer recruitment.
13. Develops ways to recognize volunteers for three, six, and nine months of community service.

Organizing involves both delegation and coordination of responsibilities. It determines who will do a job and how it will be done.

Delegation of responsibility is one of the most difficult management concepts to implement. While directors of student volunteer programs should share responsibility with student managers, they should also train student managers to delegate responsibility to other student managers and to volunteers. Giving responsibility to student managers can increase the productivity of a volunteer program because a manager who knows how to delegate multiplies the number of jobs done during a limited period of time.

Other important factors in delegating are: giving

accurate, tactful and timely feedback; defining clearly the scope of responsibility delegated; and delegating parts of complex assignments. For example, our volunteer program needed an informative and attractive method for presenting the program to campus and community audiences. One of our student managers with talents in audio-visual aids and photography designed the format and audio track for a slide show. He also took the pictures and designed the lay-out. Although he checked with the staff regularly on the cost of supplies for the project, the final product, which is now being used, was his responsibility.

Effective communication within the program is the key to coordination. Weekly staff meetings, a message board in the volunteer office, or a calendar that lists goals, objectives, and deadlines, are useful tools.

### Directing

Directing involves motivating, communicating with, and leading student managers. Some people are gifted communicators, but most of us need practice in good communication skills. There are five major groups with whom student managers must communicate: volunteers, agency personnel, university administrators, faculty, and the media.

It helps to chart channels for communicating with these different groups, using different methods for each group. Let your student managers develop a chart, using the following headings: Message (what are we trying to communicate?), Audience (to whom are we directing the message?), Method (what medium is best suited to that audience? personal interview? pamphlet? news release? public service announcement?).

Student managers should know whether their individual leadership styles are "task-oriented" or "people-oriented," and how that orientation affects others, especially with respect to motivating or leading other people toward a common goal. Managers who generally work together should notice if their leadership styles are in conflict—for example, one person may be task-oriented while another may be people-oriented. If this is the case, they should divide up the work accordingly so that as managers, they complement each other.

Evaluating and monitoring are the processes used to determine if plans have been carried out, objectives accomplished, and if goals need to be reassessed.

A formal evaluation generally requires questionnaires to be filled out by volunteers, by agencies using volunteers, and by faculty involved in the service-learning program. These forms can be designed for automatic data processing. Student managers can design these evaluation forms with the assistance of a faculty member who is familiar with computer systems.

Informal evaluation can take place at a dinner or a retreat. It generally consists of discussion and feedback, followed by a brainstorming session. Monitoring consists of ongoing reports given at weekly staff meet-

ings, when each student manager reports on student volunteer activities in his or her program area. Finally, most volunteer programs submit an annual report to the university or other funding sources. The report reviews the goals and objectives established for the year and analyzes the progress made toward achieving them. Each student manager submits a progress report on his or her assigned area, and these reports are the basis of the annual report, which summarizes them.

Directors of student volunteer programs have a responsibility to facilitate learning opportunities for student leaders by developing various management positions within their student volunteer organizations. These positions can be designed to fit a basic administrative structure, even if it has only two levels (such as Co-Chairpersons and Key Volunteers). The advantage to introducing a basic structure is that, as your student volunteer program grows, you can gradually expand it to include a middle level or levels of student managers. Once you have set up this basic structure, the management functions of staffing, planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating are executed more smoothly, while at the same time student managers learn new skills, receive on-the-job leadership training, and motivate other students. □

### Figure 3 JOB DESCRIPTION—KEY VOLUNTEER

Eligibility: Must have worked for at least three months as a volunteer-at-large in an agency.

Duties:

1. Acts as a vital member of the volunteer program staff at a single agency.
2. Reports biweekly to the appropriate Area Coordinator.
3. Reports on problems with volunteers, number of volunteers working at the agency and number continuing next quarter, new agency programs needing volunteers, schedules of orientation/training for volunteers, special agency needs, changes in agency's structure or staff.
4. Develops a rapport with the agency director or coordinator of volunteers.
5. Assists in introducing new student volunteers to the agency.
6. Helps to coordinate transportation to and from the agency.
7. Orients new agency staff to the university's volunteer program.
8. Becomes acquainted with all the agency's volunteers, including non-students, and solicits informal feedback from them about student volunteer performance.
9. Serves as the representative of the university at agency's committee or board meetings.