



# **Work together: A win-win situation with student assistants in an academic library**

**By: Erica Barnett**

## **Abstract**

As a former Hunter Library student assistant (now full-time staff member), I found that my time spent working in the library not only contributed to my success, but it gave me the opportunity to serve the library and its mission. Based on a literature review, I am not the only one who has benefited from these work experiences.

To gain a better understanding of how student assistants benefit Hunter Library and how Hunter Library impacts the student assistants, I had to investigate to dig deeper to support my observations.

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# Work Together: A Win-Win Situation with Student Assistants in an Academic Library

ERICA BARNETT, HUNTER LIBRARY

## BACKGROUND

As a former Hunter Library student assistant (now full-time staff member), I found that my time spent working in the library not only contributed to my success, but it gave me the opportunity to serve the library and its mission. Based on a literature review, I am not the only one who has benefited from these work experiences.

To gain a better understanding of how student assistants benefit Hunter Library and how Hunter Library impacts the student assistants was not immediately evident. I had to investigate to dig deeper to support my observations.

## THE HOW

Individuals were asked to anonymously complete a Qualtrics questionnaire. A flyer was used to advertise the questionnaire to current student assistants; Facebook Messenger was used to contact alumni assistants, and emails were sent to current student supervisors at Hunter Library.

STUDENT ASSISTANTS  
(3/23 RESPONSES)

PAST STUDENT ASSISTANTS, ALUMNI ASSISTANTS  
(9/18 RESPONSES)

CURRENT STUDENT SUPERVISORS  
(5/5 RESPONSES)

## FINDINGS

### HOW STUDENT ASSISTANTS BENEFIT THE LIBRARY

- Provide assistance in daily operations through general library duties
- Provide avenues of marketing library events and library services
- Support staffing needs
- May become future library employees

### HOW THE LIBRARY IMPACTS THE STUDENT ASSISTANTS

- Provide a source of income
- Support student outcomes
- Positively impacts research capabilities
- Provide opportunities for career development

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the student assistants' awareness of the library's mission statement, which will allow them to be aware of the true purpose and importance of the work they complete (Mitola, Rinto, & Pattni, 2018)
- Intentionally inform student assistant about new library services and invite them to library events as student assistants will then be knowledgeable enough to tell other students outside the library (Deuink & Seiler, 2006)
- Identify weaknesses in general staffing needs, then when possible, identify and train students assistants to fill in gaps (Mitola, Rinto, & Pattni, 2018)
- Provide in-depth information literacy instruction sessions that student assistants may not receive in one-shot English classes. This will not only help the student assistants in their studies, but will give them tools to help other students throughout campus
- Become more involved with student assistant professional goals and career paths. Identify library projects and tasks that will benefit thier goals and career choices (Benjamin, 2018)

### REFERENCES

Deuink, A. & Seiler, M. (2006). Students as library advocates: the library student advisory board at Pennsylvania State-Schuylkill. College & Research Libraries News, 67(1), 18-21.  
 Mitola, R., Rinto, E., & Pattni, E. (2018). Student employment as a high-impact practice in academic libraries: a systematic review. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 44(3), 352-373.  
 Benjamin, M. M. B. ed., & McDevitt, T. (2018). The Benefits and Challenges of Working in an Academic Library: A Study of Student Library Assistant Experience. Journal of Academic Librarianship, 44(2), 256-262

## RESULTS

### STUDENT ASSISTANTS & ALUMNI ASSISTANTS

NO PRIOR LIBRARY EXPERIENCE 2/3

#### RESPONSES TO AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

5-10 HOURS  
4

10-15 HOURS  
4

15-20 HOURS  
3

20+ HOURS  
1

THOSE WHO HAVE CONSIDERED LIBRARIANSHIP 7/12

5 of the 7 respondents were alumni assistants

100% INDICATED THEY HAVE MADE A REFERRAL TO THE LIBRARY

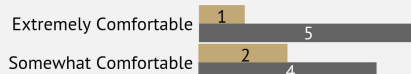
91.6% reported having told other students about library events and library resources available

THOSE AWARE OF THE LIBRARY'S MISSION STATEMENT 5

100% BELIEVE THAT WORK COMPLETED AT THE LIBRARY HAS AN IMPACT ON HUNTER LIBRARY

#### COMFORT IN RESEARCH FOR ASSIGNMENTS

■ Current Student Assistants ■ Alumni Assistants



#### HOW THE LIBRARY HELPED STUDIES

"If I hadn't worked at the library I would've had no idea the amount of resources (books, mixed media, research materials) and assistance (from librarians and staff) that were available to me. I didn't have to take an English course so I didn't have the tour of the library."

### A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SKILLS STUDENT ASSISTANTS WANT TO LEARN FROM WORKING AT THE LIBRARY AND THE SKILLS STUDENT SUPERVISORS ARE TEACHING STUDENT ASSISTANTS



REPORTED SKILLS STUDENT ASSISTANTS WANT TO LEARN



COMMON SKILLS BOTH, STUDENT ASSISTANTS AND STUDENT SUPERVISORS MENTIONED WANTING TO LEARN OR TO BE TAUGHT



REPORTED SKILLS STUDENT SUPERVISORS ARE TEACHING

### CURRENT STUDENT SUPERVISORS

#### DESIRED QUALITIES OF POTENTIAL HIRES

Independent, timely, polite, reliable, balanced, interested, leadership

100% INDICATED THEY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENT ASSISTANTS TO DEVELOP GROWTH IN THEIR ROLES

THOSE THAT ASK FOR SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENT ASSISTANTS 4/5

100% BELIEVE THAT WORK COMPLETED BY STUDENT ASSISTANTS IMPACT THE LIBRARY

STUDENT SUPERVISORS WHO USE STUDENT ASSISTANTS TO MEET STAFFING NEEDS 4/5

#### STUDENT SUPERVISORS INDICATED THAT THEY DO NOT TRAIN STUDENT ASSISTANTS ON INFORMATION LITERACY, WHY?

Learned from others (reference librarians), not a requirement for the position (but taught "how to navigate the catalog"), or student supervisors are not involved in information literacy

#### HOW THE LIBRARY, AS AN EMPLOYER, COULD BETTER PREPARE STUDENT ASSISTANTS FOR THEIR FUTURE CAREERS

Cross-train to further expand work experiences and knowledge, "help them learn to act as professionals", "tailor some library tasks to suit career path"

"I think we do a good job of this, especially for students who aren't majoring in the humanities. Having expectations for coming to work when scheduled and on time, completed assigned tasks, and pitching in when needed are skills that are good for every job. Exposure to library resources is certainly a bonus. I think an opportunity could be a more formal mentoring program."



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