Tips for Supervising Students

OVERVIEW

Proper supervision of student employees is primarily the responsibility of the supervisor in the department. Supervisory responsibilities include managing student time sheets, preparing, writing and/or updating job descriptions on an annual basis, communicating job expectations to student employees, evaluating job performance, and taking disciplinary action, when warranted.

DETAILED RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are an important component of Vassar’s labor force. Most students are dependable, creative, and trustworthy. They usually demonstrate initiative and respect confidentiality when given proper instructions. The key to good performance by students lies in good training and good supervision. Responsible employers give thought to the jobs they design for students and provide attentive direction and opportunity for feedback. When you hire students, please recognize that you are responsible for providing supervision that teaches the job, the value of the work, and good work ethics. Students can and should gain knowledge and skills from their work experience at Vassar.

During the hiring process, supervisors should discuss the job description, schedule, and other details and fully explain their expectations. Review the job and be sure that enough training will be provided to ensure the student’s ability to do the job. Try to schedule a new employee orientation time to discuss responsibilities and to suggest ways to cope with schedule conflicts. Orientation and training time are legitimate hours worked and should be paid.

Supervise the student’s work; give deadlines for assignments whenever possible, and evaluate performance frequently. Praise and encouragement go a long way, but always be honest. Students can and should learn valuable lessons about accepting both praise and constructive criticism. When a job is mundane and tedious, try to blend it with something exciting. Try to ascertain from the students what special skills and interests they have and adapt them to your workplace. This encourages the students, helps to maintain their interest, and adds a fresh, positive perspective to the work environment.

Explain the procedures that you will follow in dealing with infractions (a student who does not show up for work, for example, or one who is frequently late) so that the student will know in advance the consequences of these failures. Defined policies regarding lateness and absenteeism will make these issues easier to deal with should they arise.

DISCIPLINE/TERMINATION PROCESS

For all our student employees, work should be viewed as part of their education. Employment should be a learning experience for the students. For some, this is their very first job. For many, employment is part of their financial aid package, but that does not mean it cannot be terminated. Careful consideration should always be given prior to termination of a student’s employment. Nevertheless, if a student is unreliable or fails to perform required responsibilities, he or she may (and should) be terminated. Students are entitled to prior notice and termination shouldn't come as a
surprise. The best termination is one where both parties agree that the placement is not working and resolve to end the employment. When this happens, there are seldom bad feelings, and the student may seek a more appropriate situation elsewhere on campus.

We recommend the following steps when disciplining a student but hope that through good communication such steps can be avoided.

a. The supervisor should give a verbal warning to the student indicating the problems and suggestions for improvement. The supervisor is encouraged to state “this is a verbal warning” and outline the consequences if performance is not improved (i.e., progressive discipline and dismissal process).

b. If the situation does not improve, the supervisor should issue a written warning to the student stating the problem and the terms to be met if employment is to continue. The student should be given an opportunity to improve by a certain date. A copy must be sent to the SEO.

c. If the student fails to improve, written notice of termination is given to the student by the supervisor of the department. All grounds for termination should be stated. A copy must be sent to the SEO.

The above procedures should be followed except in the case of flagrant violations for which a student should be terminated immediately. Such reasons include but are not limited to:

- Falsifying a time sheet
- Stealing
- Insubordination
- Breach of confidentiality
- Physical or sexual abuse

Departments should contact the SEO immediately in any of these cases. In such cases, students may be charged with violating college regulations and may be brought before the College Regulations Panel for disciplinary action. Repayment of any federal funding and loss of future employment as well as other actions may result. Financial aid students will be required to make up the employment earnings limit on their own without assistance from the college.

ANNUAL EVALUATIONS

The SEO encourages supervisors to evaluate the performance of their student employees at regular intervals. There is no formal evaluation process. Supervisors should give feedback with students by providing them with either written or verbal comments. Supervisors who maintain good communication throughout the year have the most productive and happiest student employees.