

# Training library student assistants

## Bloomsburg University's interactive instructional program

by Erik Poole, Frank Grieco, Heather Derck, and Tom Socash

**B**loomsburg University, located in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, is home to the newly constructed Harvey A. Andruss Library. This state-of-the-art building, which opened May 26, 1998, now offers stack space for more than 400,000 volumes, up-to-date equipment for viewing more than 1.7 million microfilms in the library's collection, and open access to current periodicals, as well as pre-1987 journals that had been in storage.

These enhancements have led to an increased reliance on student employees to perform basic duties and functions. These students are expected to perform a wide variety of tasks ranging from assisting patrons to shelving library items.

### The problem

Faced with the dilemma of providing in-depth, consistent training to a large number of students on an individual basis, the library's supervisors contacted the Institute of Interac-

tive Technologies. A group of five graduate students volunteered to design and develop a fully computerized training program, which was to be accessible to the students in the library.

The evaluation of the initial training provided to student employees revealed several inadequacies. Students received only one or two hours of one-on-one training with a supervisor before being asked to serve patrons.

In addition, the participation of various supervisors in the delivery of the training had intro-

duced inconsistent results. The training also proved daunting for the library supervisors due to the large influx of new students each semester. Finally, the minimal number of training hours could not possibly prepare a student to handle all the responsibilities that the job demands.

Providing the students with individualized training became difficult due to students' con-



The main menu displaying the four sections of the training program.

### About the authors

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flicting and hectic schedules. Instead of being able to train a group of students at a time, the supervisors were forced to deal with each student on an individual basis. This took up large portions of time, which forced supervisors to neglect other important tasks.

### The solution

The interactive instructional program developed to meet these needs encompasses the four major skill sets used by students employed at the circulation desk. These areas include basic customer service, the handling of periodicals, the handling of reserved materials, and the use of "Voyager," the computerized library catalog. With presentation of lesson content, the program provides an assessment for each subject area and tracking of student achievement.

The main menu is broken down into four lessons, one for each major skill set. At the end of each lesson, the student is presented with a review section summarizing the section's content and the option to repeat the lesson or complete a practice assessment.

Each practice assessment contains four objective questions, which are designed to allow the student to work with the material presented in the lesson and also to determine whether the student is ready to move on to the final assessment. A score of 75% must be achieved in each practice section for the student to be allowed access to each lesson's final assessment. This process ensures that the students have retained a sufficient amount of information from the lesson content prior to viewing the final assessment.

The program provides interactive examples and presents ordinary scenarios associated with the circulation desk. This gives the students a chance to encounter common tasks without any real consequences occurring if a mistake is made. It also familiarizes

the student on the basic roles and responsibilities one has while working at the circulation desk.

### The results

The program allowed students to receive training without the aid of a supervisor and on an individualized basis. The supervisor's duties were minimized to only checking assessment scores and monitoring student progress. Students were able to access the training at any time in accordance to their schedule. The program also delivers the training in a standardized format, eliminating any

discrepancies. Now, every student is taught the same group of procedures and nothing is left out due to lack of time.

The key element in any training program is to produce evidence of learning. All students participating in the training program's evaluation had no prior experience in the area of library services.

In small-group evaluations, eight students were asked to complete all four lessons and assessments in one session.

For all lessons, the students surpassed the minimum mastery level of 75% or 3 of the 4 practice activities on their first attempt. Also, 87.5% of the students tested achieved the required mastery level on the final assessments after going through the training only once. The mean scores and required mastery levels for the final assessments are summarized in Table 1.

In actual delivery, student employees of the Andruss Library will review each of the lessons separately over the span of a week. This will allow the students to peruse each lesson until they are comfortable with the content, and complete the assessments individually. Therefore, it is anticipated that a higher rate of achievement will be realized upon actual implementation. ■

	Customer Service	Reserves	Voyager	Periodicals
Mean Achievement	89.1%	80.0%	83.8%	75.0%
Required Achievement	75.0%	80.0%	80.0%	75.0%

Chart 1

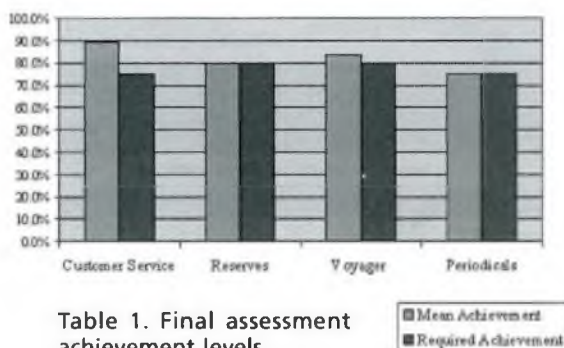


Table 1. Final assessment achievement levels.

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