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Effective Management

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1 Introduction

As in any workplace, effective management is needed to ensure smooth operations. One aspect of this is staff management: rules and expectations need to be set, communicated, and enforced, while maintaining an environment in which staff feel valued and supported. Another aspect is determining what services a QMaSC will provide, then implementing and maintaining them.

2 Managing Staff

The employees of a Quantitative and Mathematics Support Center (QMaSC) are often managed by the director of the center, or occasionally a director's assistant. For directors who are new to managing staff, it is worth taking some time to develop a management style that will guide the director's interactions with employees. One aspect of this is finding the right balance between friendliness and professionalism, which can vary due to a director's personality and the level of the staff. To establish a clear boundary, at a center in which staff members include community college or undergraduate students who may be without much prior work experience, the director may benefit from refraining from conversations that are not work related, and from socializing outside of work with the staff. Even so, a friendly, approachable demeanor can still be maintained so that staff members are comfortable seeking assistance from the director when needed. Some

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directors with non-student or graduate student employees have an occasional staff social activity such as a happy hour. In any case, the end result should be the same — to create a positive work environment in which employees respect the director’s authority, see the director as accessible, feel supported but not micromanaged, and understand that good job performance is necessary and failing to do so will have consequences.

Center directors typically communicate the rules and practices expected of the staff in multiple ways, usually including both a written document and a training meeting (if the training meeting is required, it must be paid time) [1]. The written document is emailed to staff members, distributed in paper form, posted in the center, posted online, or some combination of these possibilities. In some centers, employees are required to initial or sign the document to acknowledge that they have read and understood it. Possible topics include:

- 1) General conduct expectations, such as being on time, refraining from inappropriate language, refraining from cell phone use or other distracting behaviors, dressing appropriately, avoiding strong perfumes or scents, etc. Also, appropriate vs. inappropriate interactions between tutor and tutee (for example, refraining from physical contact, and avoiding language, intonation, or gestures that could be misunderstood as offensive or as sexual harassment).
- 2) What breaks are allowed during work (if any). Directors should be aware of school policies and state laws regarding breaks; for example, Washington State requires 10 minutes (consecutive or broken up) paid break time for every 4 consecutive hours worked, and employees cannot be scheduled for more than 5 consecutive hours without a 30 minute meal break [2]. An institution’s human resource office should be able to provide this information.
- 3) How employees report their hours for pay (i.e. instructions for filling out and submitting time sheets).
- 4) Instructions on what an employee should do if he or she needs to miss a shift due to a conflict known in advance or due to an emergency situation.
- 5) Beginning and end-of-shift duties.
- 6) Reminders regarding tutoring practices, such as what the employee should do when stuck on a problem, distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate levels of help to provide, or what an employee working in a drop-in tutoring environment should do when not actively helping a student. For more information about training employees regarding tutoring methods, refer to section IV of this handbook.
- 7) Maintaining student confidentiality, potentially including restrictions on sharing information such as a student’s grade on an assessment, in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [3] .

- 8) How to handle on-site emergencies when higher-level supervision isn't present, if applicable. This might include distinguishing when to call campus security vs. 911, and how to call either from a campus phone.
- 9) Appropriate and inappropriate uses of the center's resources such as phones and computers. For state schools, this may be limited by state law in addition to center's or school's policies. For example, Washington State's legal code allows for brief, infrequent personal use of state-owned resources if, "there is little or no cost to the state," and the use is not for personal financial gain [4].

Employees with little or no prior work experience might need a bit more guidance and patience than more experienced employees. If employees are carefully selected and expectations are clearly communicated, problems with employees will be infrequent. However, some centers do experience problems such as employees who repeatedly arrive late to work, submit timesheets late or inaccurately, etc. In these situations, protocols vary among centers for addressing these issues, in particular whether initial interventions are written and/or verbal and the level of formality of the process. If the reprimand is due to an incident that was reported by a student or another staff member, it is possible that the report might be somewhat biased or based on a misunderstanding. A conversation with the employee allows him or her to share the other side of the story. In any situation, it is important to be clear about the nature of the issue, the expectations for improvement, and the potential consequences for failure to improve. If it seems that the employee might not understand why the behavior was problematic, explaining the consequences of the issue helps to maintain a good working relationship rather than risk being perceived as authoritarian. As an example, an employee who is routinely late to work in a drop-in tutoring center can be told that his or her tardiness reduces the availability of help available before he or she arrives, causing students to have to wait longer to get their questions answered. This in turn creates a stressful situation for other staff members who are trying to keep up with demand.

It is advisable to keep written records on situations and resulting written or in-person disciplinary interactions that might lead to an employee's dismissal. Doing so will help the director to remember what was discussed, and it might become useful at some point to have evidence of the situation. A warning to a staff member whose employment will be terminated if he or she repeats the problematic behavior should be issued in writing, and the employee should sign a copy acknowledging receipt of the warning.

If staff members are hourly employees, formal procedures such as written warnings and keeping records of misconduct can be useful, but are not necessary for terminating an employee in many instances. Employees of this type are often "at-will" employees, meaning that they do not have a contract stating their length of employment and they can be terminated for almost any reason (or even for no reason) aside from discrimination. Due to this, employees can legally be dismissed

with little or no explanation, but documentation could be useful if an employee claimed his or her termination was discriminatory. Exceptions to at-will employment aside from discrimination vary in different states, so directors should be aware of local laws. If a director is considering terminating an employee and wants guidance on how to proceed, his or her institution's human resource office should be a good place to turn.

While setting and enforcing expectations takes some care, the positive aspects of the center will outweigh the negatives. Ideally, the center will become a resource which is beloved by students due to the great work of the staff. There are several ways to maintain a positive working environment to encourage and sustain a high level of work. One is having leadership that is responsive to the employees' needs. For example, a director who also works with students (as opposed to having primarily administrative duties) can pitch in "on the floor" if the center gets busy and tutors cannot keep up with students' questions. In addition to reducing the students' wait times, it diffuses a situation in which tutors feel pressured to work faster and as a result become stressed and less able to offer high-quality tutoring. It also gives the director valuable perspectives on what the tutors experience in day-to-day situations. A responsive director should also let employees know that he or she is happy and willing to help them if they are stuck on a problem or have other questions. Reminding them of this helps encourage employees who might otherwise be shy about approaching the director, especially if he or she seems busy, to seek out the help they need.

To make sure employees understand their importance to the center, the director should provide positive reinforcement. One part of this is by letting the employees know how much their work is appreciated, when speaking to them both in groups and individually. Also, the director should collect feedback from students using the center and anonymously share comments with tutors to pass on positive feedback and identify areas for staff development. The occasional gesture such as bringing in cookies is sure to be taken as a welcome sign of appreciation. If employees have ideas they perceive as improvements for the center (whether regarding tutoring methods or something more operational), the director should take the time to listen to and consider the ideas to show that he or she values their input, even if the suggestion is not ultimately implemented. In group meetings, allowing time for employees to talk about successes they have had in explaining concepts or how they have handled certain student situations helps to further develop their sense of value to the center while also spreading good ideas to other staff members.

3 Program Management

A Quantitative and Mathematics Support Center might consider offering any of a variety of activities to support students. The most common type of support is a drop-in center in which tutoring staff are available to answer questions. Some centers also offer one-on-one tutoring appointments, workshops, study groups, and/or Supplemental Instruction. Informing faculty which

of these services the center provides allows them to promote the activities in their classes.

Drop-in tutoring is the easiest to implement, as it does not require content preparation (unlike workshops, for example). Also, once a staff schedule is established, it can remain fairly constant during the school term, though some centers track their usage throughout the day and alter the schedule to better align staffing levels with student demand. A drop-in environment typically serves as a study space in which students can work individually or with classmates. To allow students to distinguish tutors from other students when they have questions, tutors typically wear nametags. The most common way for students to access help when they have a question is simply to raise their hands. It should be recommended that when tutors are not actively working with students, they look around the center for students with confused or frustrated expressions; these students might benefit from getting help, but may be shy about asking or unaware that a tutor is available. Help in the drop-in environment is often provided on a problem-by-problem basis; tutors assist students on just a problem or two and then encourage them to try working independently using what they have learned, especially when there are other students waiting for help. Some drop-in centers are divided by level (e.g. pre-college level and college level, where applicable) or more specifically by course. This sort of division can increase collaboration among students in the same class and increase efficiency in serving students especially in centers where different staff members are hired for different strengths.

Some students may want more contact time with a tutor than the drop-in environment typically provides. A center may offer longer one-on-one or small group tutoring sessions (often twenty minutes to an hour) for these students, though at some schools another campus program provides this service. Appointments are often arranged and managed using programs such as TutorTrac. Readers considering implementing this type of support can refer to section II of this handbook. In a center which offers both drop-in tutoring and one-on-one appointments, tutors in the drop-in environment should be advised to keep an eye out for students who seem like they could use more intensive assistance and recommend one-on-one appointments to those students.

Workshops are an efficient way to help multiple students at a time. In some places, they are delivered by the same employees who also provide general tutoring, though elsewhere, they are delivered by staff members with additional training, faculty members, or the director of the center. Workshops may be given on a wide variety of topics; when deciding what workshops to offer, the director can ask faculty members teaching the courses supported by the center what they perceive their students need. Some workshops are not course-specific, covering topics such as study skills or test-taking strategies. At schools where a specific calculator (e.g. a TI-84) is recommended or required for one or more courses, a workshop at the beginning of the term on using the calculator is another option. Some centers also deliver course-specific workshops, either regular supplements to lectures focusing on topics known to be challenging or less frequent exam reviews. Involving faculty in the planning of course-specific workshops is useful for finding out what topics to emphasize and

ensuring that methods used are consistent with lectures.

Some centers organize study groups, an opportunity for students taking the same course to meet and work together. Study groups can be on a drop-in basis, or students may sign up at the beginning of the term with the expectation that they will attend all sessions. In the latter case, students might sign up via a sheet sent around the classroom, in the center, or via the center's website. Study groups vary in format; some involve reviews of material given by the staff member leading the group, similar to a workshop but allowing more time for students to work together on problems, while others are more discussion-based, led by a facilitator who is trained to foster conversations in which students assist and learn from each other. Topics beyond the basic material, such as study strategies and problem solving skills, are sometimes discussed. The facilitator may occasionally attend classes or have contact with faculty teaching the course to keep the content aligned with the course.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic support system targeting "historically difficult courses" developed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in 1973 and adopted by hundreds of schools internationally [5]. SI involves regular group sessions, "in which students compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict test items," led by trained SI leaders [5]. SI leaders are typically students who previously took the course themselves and finished with a high grade, often recommended by faculty teaching the course. They attend all class meetings, and are trained to facilitate discussions during SI sessions in which they guide students to work together and share strategies, though leaders do not provide additional instruction on the material or help with homework[6]. The International Center for Supplemental Instruction at UMKC offers regular Supervisor trainings for schools implementing the program [7].

4 Conclusion

Taking time both to manage staff as described in this chapter and to thoughtfully select and implement services provided by the center is well worth a QMaSC director's efforts and has multiple benefits in the long run. A center with staff that understand what is expected of them, along with well-implemented programs, will allow students to efficiently get the quality assistance that they need while minimizing the number of problems that arise.

5 Bibliography

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