UWired Community Technology Partnerships
Community Technology Center Program

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2001, the University of Washington (UW) Office of Educational Partnerships and learning technologies launched a pilot program of placing University students in Community Technology Centers (CTCs) to provide network support services and to create opportunities for University students to develop their technology and consulting skills. During this pilot, 12 UW students from a variety of majors were assigned to 9 CTCs in the Seattle area. The CTCs involved in the partnership are located in a variety of diverse neighborhoods and are charged with providing computer resources and technical assistance to community residents.

METHODS

In June, participating CTC representatives were asked to complete a two-page questionnaire. The survey contained questions intended to assess CTC needs, UWired student performance, and general outcomes of the partnerships. The survey consisted of twenty-one Likert scale items and five open-ended questions that addressed program outcomes, and provided an opportunity for representatives to give recommendations for program improvements. Nine representatives were mailed the survey with follow up e-mails sent a month later to thank those who had returned the survey and to encourage others to complete the survey. Means were tabulated for Likert scale items and responses to open-ended questions were grouped according to useful categories of response. The small number of responses allowed minimal grouping.

At the end of the academic year, UW students who had participated in the program were also asked to complete an online survey. The survey consisted of seven multiple-choice and 5 Likert scale items in addition to one open-ended question. Questions were designed to obtain information about student experience at the CTCs, their perspectives about the program and their recommendations for improvement. Students were sent a reminder and a second request for their participation one month after the initial request.

FINDINGS

CTC Representatives

Five out of the 9 CTC representatives completed the questionnaire; a 56% response rate. This included 4 Lab Coordinators and 1 CTC Director. The responses for each question were analyzed using means and frequency counts.

Three program areas were assessed: CTC needs, Performance of Students, and Outcomes of the Program.

Needs

- A majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that their CTC was in need of network and desktop support and that staff were in need of enhanced technology skills training.

- Forty percent of the respondents indicated that their staff needed more support than the UWired program offered and the other 60% were not sure or disagreed that their staff needed more support.

Performance

- Overall, representatives were very satisfied with the performance of the UWired students. All five coordinators agreed that the students met expectations and had exceptional skills.

- Performance ratings for UWired administration were also assessed. Sixty percent of the respondents were not sure if the administration was available when necessary and also indicated "not sure" in response to the statement, "The administration of the UWired program was outstanding." Forty percent of the respondents were satisfied with the administration's performance.

Outcomes

- Overall, CTC Coordinators and the Director were satisfied with the outcomes of the UWired program. They agreed that the students helped troubleshoot technical problems and that their CTCs needed this support.

- One respondent felt the student did not help the CTC meet its technical goals and another respondent felt the student did not help the CTC meet its instructional needs.

Open-ended responses

- All of the respondents (100%) felt that their identified technology needs were well met by the UWired student. Some of the needs listed by the CTC representatives included troubleshooting and fixing problems (2), and teaching basic skills and class presentations (3). An additional outcome was that one CTC was able to remain open to the public on evenings and weekends.

- When asked what additional training they would like the students to receive, one respondent (20%) indicated customer service. One stated that they would pay for training if it directly benefited their program, and one noted that they would expect a long-term relationship if they were to pay for 6 hours of student training.

Recommendations for improvement were related to logistical aspects of the program. These included: .

- More communication with UWired administrators (1),

- A brochure or flyer to explain the role of UWired and the application/hiring process (1)

- Increasing the duration of the program to enhance exposure to the community and diverse social groups (2)

Community Technology Center Questionnaire and Response Frequencies

Student Responses

Two out of 12 students who received the request to participate in the online survey and the follow-up email reminder responded; a 17% response rate. .

From the two students' responses to the online survey, the following points can be made:.

- One student felt his/her skills changed from a "beginner" to having "intermediate" skills.

- Both students mostly worked with students at the CTC and felt they made a positive contribution there and helped the CTC meet its goals.

- Both students felt that they needed troubleshooting and network skills and agreed that the CTCs needed more support than they could offer.

- The students suggested the need for more training.

- Both students were "unsure" if the UWired administrators were available for help when they needed it.

Student Responses

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the small sample size of respondents (five of nine representatives and two of 12 students), it is difficult to make generalizable conclusions about the success of this pilot and the improvements that may be necessary for future program development. It is possible that those respondents who provided answers to the surveys were not representative of the program as a whole.

Based on the information received, it is evident that the representatives were satisfied with the program and students were a valuable asset to them. The CTCs appear to have a great need for the type of skilled support that is provided by students. In general, the students felt that they were able to make a positive contribution at the CTCs and assisted them in meeting their goals. Both students and representatives reported some ambiguity about the availability of UWired administration.

Future partnerships may wish to place two students at each CTC in order to effectively assist and meet the CTC's needs or one student for a longer period of time. Increasing the length of these partnerships would most likely be well received by the CTCs and give the students' an opportunity to learn more technical as well as customer-service skills. It may also be advantageous to incorporate a training program as well as written materials for the students and CTCs. These materials would assist students and staff in understanding the goals of the program and give them information about where to obtain support and information.