

**A reinventing of a Student Employment Program with the development of  
Career Pathing**

**Paula McLain**

**Northwest Missouri State University**

## **ABSTRACT**

The Career Pathing Program is an enhanced Student Employment program and is currently in the pilot stages at Northwest Missouri State University. The Program resulted from a compilation of research conducted at Northwest. Northwest, initially, administered its first Student Employment Satisfaction Survey in 2003. The information gathered from the survey along with research later conducted by a Marketing Research Class Project initiated the development of the Career Pathing Program.

The Student Employment Satisfaction Survey was implemented to enhance student employment at Northwest by acquiring insight into the attitudes and opinions of current on-campus student employees. The Student Employment Satisfaction Survey is conducted on an annual basis and distributed to all student employees. The participation of the survey has continually increased over the years since it first began in 2003. Nearly eighty percent of all student employees participated in the most recent survey conducted in November 2006. Some of the conclusions ascertained from the first survey conducted in November 2003 are: student employees wanted the opportunity for advancements in pay with increased responsibility and challenges; Student employees wanted the opportunity to build relations that would enhance future careers.

The primary objective of the Marketing Research Project, completed by seven Northwest undergraduate students, was to gather information on training/compensation-based programs at other colleges and universities. The research was conducted in the spring of 2004 with 38 out of 41 peer institutions participating in a telephone survey. The conclusions of the Marketing Research Project are: jobs are on an application basis; Student Employment programs are typically centralized in the Office of Financial Assistance; most peer institutions do not have student employment training/orientation of any kind; there is a lack of advancement opportunities offered to students; and a high percentage of schools said they would like to offer a training program or more training opportunities if they already had a training program.

The Northwest Student Employment Program Mission states: The Student Employment Program supports Northwest Missouri State University by coordinating efforts to provide students with educational employment opportunities. Student Employment provides experiences that promote learning and foster career development. Additionally, programs and services are offered that enhance Northwest's Strategic Educational and Service Key Quality Indicators.

In an effort to uphold the mission of the Student Employment Program and respond to the needs of the student employees' satisfaction, the Career Pathing Program was developed. The Career Pathing Program provides student employees with the opportunity to advance to a new level of pay and responsibility once they have completed specified criteria. The criteria of the program are student employees must: 1) work both a fall and spring trimester in the same department; 2) attend at least 3 out of 8 training opportunities offered per trimester; and 3) have a satisfactory performance evaluation completed by their supervisor.

## **INTRODUCTION OF THE ORGANIZATION**

Northwest Missouri State University is a state-assisted, four year regional university that was founded in 1905, with a recognized tradition of quality education. Northwest is located in Maryville, Missouri, a rural community of 10,000 and has a total enrollment of approximately 6,500 students. Northwest is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and provides opportunities for bachelor's, master's and specialist in education degrees as well as one- and two- year certificate programs.

Northwest has distinguished itself among American universities in at least three areas: First, our electronic campus; second, our Culture of Quality; and third, our outstanding athletic programs.

In 1987, Northwest installed the first comprehensive electronic campus in the nation by equipping every residence hall room and faculty office with a networked computer workstation.

Today, Northwest students have continuous seven-day-a-week access to the internet, e-mail, the library, over 200 databases, and 100 instructional videos-all from the convenience of their residence hall rooms. Additionally, a University operated cable television network allows students to schedule educational programs on their TV as well as watch their favorite TV shows.

Twenty-seven specialized computer laboratories supplement this system. Obviously, our students and faculty have an advantage when it comes to easy access to computing resources.

Our Culture of Quality program also was launched in 1987. Today, we use the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria as a conceptual framework for discussing quality and as a template for planning and agenda setting. Our faculty continues to push the frontier when it comes to innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Northwest students show greater satisfaction than the national average with every dimension of university life as measured by the Noel-Levitz survey. Over the last two years, the University has received numerous awards and

recognition for its quality efforts, including the National Association of College and University Business Officers First Place Award and the prestigious Missouri Quality Award.

Northwest's athletic teams continue to win honors on the field or court and in the classroom.

Most recently, the Bearcats won back-to-back NCAA Division II National Football Championships (1998 and 1999) while placing the largest number of players on the MIAA Academic Honor Roll. In 1997-98 Northwest was honored as the best overall athletic program in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletic Association

Northwest has a total number of 716 faculty and staff and approximately 940 student employees of which 114 are Graduate Assistants.

### **Northwest Vision**

Northwest will keep its student-centered “Culture of Quality” vital by continually developing all individuals in the University community, by accommodating and celebrating diverse learners and ways of learning, and by practicing quality in all we do. All elements of the University will function seamlessly and purposefully to ensure a measurably better living, learning, and work experience.

### **Northwest Mission**

Northwest Missouri State University is a moderately selective, learner-centered regional university offering a focused range of undergraduate and graduate programs. Historically, the University serves 19 northwest Missouri counties, emphasizing programs relating to agriculture, business, and education.

In its undergraduate programs, Northwest is committed to providing students a strong general education core, preparing them for a world of constant change.

The University is a national leader in applying information technology to improve learning processes and in promoting continuous quality improvement to enhance performance in all of its activities. As a leader and initiator of cooperative efforts within its region, Northwest seeks to expand and improve access to learning and to promote applied research designed to address regional and state issues.

Northwest has the following Cultural Core Values: We focus on our students and stakeholders; We care about each other; We are a learning organization, continually improving our University and ourselves; We collaborate and work together to accomplish our goals; We master the details of what we do; We are open and ethical; and We are leaders in our field.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Northwest was challenged with the dissatisfaction of student employees in relation to the lack of opportunities for advancement in pay with increased responsibility and challenges and the lack of opportunities to build relations that would enhance future careers.

### **DESIGN**

The decision to implement the Career Pathing Program for student employees involved reengineering the entire Student Employment Program. The first step implemented in the process was the administration of a Student Employee Satisfaction Survey in the fall of 2003.

The Satisfaction Survey was created by the Office of Human Resources along with the assistance of undergraduate students and student employment supervisors. The instrument was initially distributed by mail and incurred photocopy expense and envelope purchase for 1,200 surveys.

Participants were encouraged to participate by being entered into a drawing to receive one of five \$20.00 gift certificates from Barnes and Noble. The survey is now distributed by email to all

student employees on campus who have an active assignment defined on the electronic human resources system (HRS). The electronic distribution of the survey is done at no expense.

Remark Web Survey Software 3.0 is used to administer the survey and its results. The software is historically used by the Office of Institutional Research at Northwest to administer over 250 surveys a year and was not required as a new purchase for this event. Student employees are compensated for their time to complete the survey if it is done while they are at work.

Supervisors are encouraged to allow students to complete the survey while at work in hopes of increasing participation in the survey.

Research was then conducted in spring 2004 by undergraduate students, in a Marketing class, in an effort to examine other college and university student employment practices. This survey was conducted by telephone or if the institution requested by electronic format through email. The expense for this research included copies of their research for the class to present, long distance telephone fees and postage which incurred a small total expense of about \$100.

Once all of the data was collected from both surveys a Student Employment Advisor Board was formed consisting of hand picked exemplary student employment supervisors and student employees. The Advisory Board consists of ten student employment supervisors, the Coordinator of Student Employment, Director of Human Resources and three student employees. The criteria and process for advancement in the program was determined by the Student Employment Advisor Board. The Board met on an as-needed-basis and created the foundation of the program along with the employee evaluation tool. There was no expense for the planning process of the program. Once the criteria were determined the Coordinator of Student Employment and Director of Human Resources met with all student employment supervisors to present the layout of the program and discuss concerns and address questions from the group.

Next, ten departments with an approximate total of 100 student employees were selected to be in the pilot stages of the program. It was crucial to select departments and supervisors that enforced student employment policies and completed supervisor requirements in a timely manner. Student employees within the ten departments were invited to attend an introductory meeting to become familiar with the program. The program was emphasized as strictly voluntary and will continue on that basis.

Meetings were conducted with the Financial Assistance Office, Payroll Office, VP of Finance Office and the Programming Department to discuss any changes, concerns or ramifications in implementing the program, such as: will financial assistance packages be affected based on the opportunity for increased wage rates; will there be special programming that will need to take place to electronically implement the wage increase and record advancements; how will this affect payroll issues and finances.

The Office of Human Resources then researched and selected eight presenters for the first trimester of training sessions (spring 2005). Each training session is offered twice within the same day to allow student employees to attend between scheduled classes. Training sessions are offered on both personal and professional development issues. Presenters consist of on-campus faculty and staff and off-campus professional speakers. Generally four off-campus professional speakers and four on-campus speakers are scheduled each trimester. Most on-campus presenters have no fee and incur no expense for their presentation. Occasionally there may be photocopies made for participant handouts or a meal expense for the presenter. Off-campus professional speakers have various fees. Speaker fees have ranged from as little as \$150 to as much as \$3,000 depending on the speaker, travel expenses and other fees. A trimester of eight training sessions has cost anywhere from \$6,600 to \$12,990. Student employees are compensated for their

attendance at each of the training sessions. Sessions may be anywhere from 50 to 90 minutes each depending on the presenter and topic presented. Some students attend these sessions during regular work hours which incurs no additional time or cost to the University. Each training session is evaluated by the participants in an effort to determine the value to the participant. Attendance of the participants is recorded and shared with each supervisor to confirm documented time on timesheets.

After the first trimester of course offerings, it was determined to be beneficial to add a third session for four of the eight presenters to allow staff to attend. Many student employment supervisors and staff members expressed a desire to be included in the trainings that were being provided. The third session is conducted on the same day and requires no additional cost in most cases. The four trainings that are selected for the staff to attend are also available to all student employees who may not be in the pilot program and all graduate assistants. This allows the University to maximize the efficiency of the cost for the presenter.

Once student employees provide a year of service to their department and complete three training sessions each trimester they then participate in a one-on-one performance evaluation with their supervisor. The supervisor reviews their work performance and indicates to the Office of Human Resources satisfactory or dissatisfactory performance. If satisfactory performance is indicated, the student is eligible for a \$.25 per hour wage increase the next trimester and can repeat the same requirements to be eligible for an additional \$.25 increase each year of service. Along with the wage increase is a new position level title for the student employee.

The various degrees of advancement and their titles, along with an example are listed below:

<b>Level</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Wage Increase</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Level I</b>	Student Employee	Starting Salary	\$6.50
<b>Level II</b>	Student Assistant	Pay plus raise of \$0.25	\$6.75
<b>Level III</b>	Student Associate	Raise another \$0.25	\$7.00
<b>Level IV</b>	Student Manager	Raise another \$0.25	\$7.25
<b>Level V</b>	Student Trainer	Raise \$0.50	\$7.75

Student employees can surpass Levels II and III and apply directly to be a Student Trainer. This position requires the student to be an exemplary employee and one who would train other students within their area. The process to obtain this status can be rigorous and requires the recommendation of the direct supervisor.

The development and the administration of this program required no additional personnel. The entire program is administered by the Office of Human Resources staff.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Once an institution determines to implement such a program it is important to educate and inform departments and individuals affected by its efforts and gather support to implicate a successful commencement of the program.

An introductory supervisors' meeting was conducted to inform the supervisors of the planning of the new program and listen to any suggestions along with responding to any questions and/or concerns they may have. Many supervisors were concerned with how the absence of the students during scheduled work time would affect the operations of their offices. It was

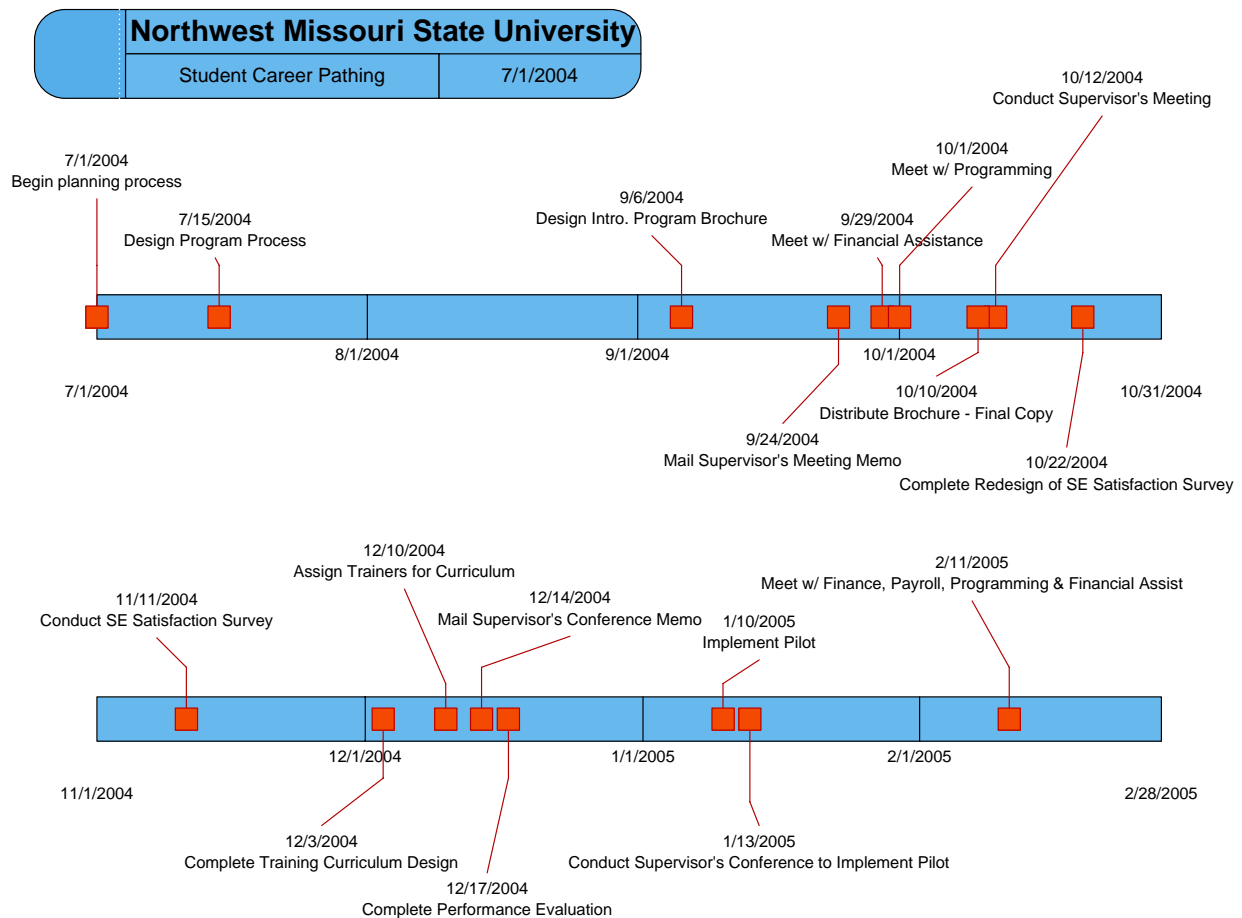
explained to the supervisors that the students may or may not attend training during work hours and if the only time they had available to attend was during scheduled work hours the amount of time required would be minimal (3 to 6 hours over a 4 month period of time). Many supervisors now agree the value of the education and skills the students obtain at the trainings far exceeds the loss of time at work. Another concern supervisors expressed was how the wage increases and compensation for time to attend the training sessions would affect their student labor budgets. Once again looking at the amount of time being spent in training attendance, there was minimal cause for concern regarding budget issues. Many of the students may have currently been working the maximum of 20 hours per week, so they were still be compensated for only 20 hours as they were required to reduce their work hours to allow time to attend the training sessions. Other concerns have been what if the students can't complete the required number of training sessions per trimester. The total number of training sessions offered each trimester is 16 sessions (8 sessions offered twice within one day) along with 4 additional staff sessions. There have been insignificant issues regarding students not being able to attend the required number of sessions with a total of 20 different opportunities to attend just 3 sessions (students may be allowed to attend a staff session if it is a last resort to achieve the requirements and they have made an honest effort to attend). We have had sessions we needed to cancel due to circumstances beyond our control and have allowed the students to make up a session by attending a prior approved event, such as a campus lecturer, etc. There have been very few issues in the implementation of the program that can't be solved in a timely and sufficient manner like the ones previously described.

It is important that each trimester of training is planned far enough in advance that there is time to create marketing publications and inform the campus. Generally all training sessions are

booked for a trimester at least three months prior to the beginning of the trimester. Sometimes advance planning can cut costs on other programming on campus, for instance a presenter hired for the Career Pathing Program may also present for another event on campus and provide a reduced fee due to the events being close in proximity.

The planning process for this type of a program can happen very quickly or over the course of time depending on the detail and requirements an institution chooses to put in place. There is no magic to the number of training sessions offered or the amount of wage increase allowed or the type of performance evaluation tool utilized. The content and criteria is ultimately up to the individual institution.

A timeline of the initial planning for the Career Pathing Program is provided below:



## **BENEFITS**

The uniqueness of this program is that the training, service and performance evaluation are all significant to the student employee advancing in the program. The research conducted to gather information regarding other college and university student employment programs indicated that most colleges and universities already have a pay schedule increase for their student employees. This program, if implemented by institutions that already practice integrated pay scales, would only incur the cost of the training fees. The beauty of the program is that it can be as diminutive or as vast as the institution implementing the program wishes. The faculty and staff within institutions provide a wide variety of skills, talent and knowledge to be shared with others. This program can exist within the institution and rely on no outside presenters incurring minimal costs or can be elaborate with well-known and expert speakers who may cost thousands.

The Career Pathing Program results in many benefits to the University, the students and the individual departments. Some of the known benefits are it: promotes increased student employee responsibility; creates opportunities for pay advancement; encourages continual feedback for personal development and professional development; promotes long-term employment relationships with departments; and contributes to Northwest's Service Initiative and Culture.

## **RETROSPECT**

Many of the things that may have been done differently in the beginning have now, with our fifth trimester of implementation, been rectified. Initially the training programs were restricted only to student employees, which was a disservice to the University's funding and to its employees.

Now all employees have the opportunity to attend the training sessions available, whether they are student employees, Graduate Assistants or full time staff. We have created new processes in booking presenters by creating a “contract” to ensure everyone understands the expectations for the event. This has decreased confusion and miscommunication and protects the University. We have also enhanced our advertisement of the events by providing electronic email reminders of the training opportunities and send them to each staff, student employee and graduate assistant on campus. We have purchased Tutor Trac software to assist with logging and tracking the training attendance. Tutor Trac software also sends automated reminders and missed appointment notifications and is capable of compiling reports of training sessions offered and attendance by each employee group. The total cost of the software was \$2,370. Currently training records are done manually and once the new software program is implemented it should save time and provide additional record keeping capabilities.