Wellness Support for Student Library Employees: A Staff Development Tool Kit for Library Employees Who Supervise Students

Heather Burroughs
*University of New Hampshire*, Heather.Burroughs@unh.edu

Judy Quist
*University of New Hampshire*, judy.quist@unh.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/library_pub

Recommended Citation
Burroughs, H. and Quist, J. (2020) Wellness Support for Student Library Employees: A Staff Development Tool Kit for Library Employees Who Supervise Students in S. Holder & A. Lannon (Eds.) Student Wellness and Academic Libraries: Case Studies and Activities for Promoting Health and Success (pp. 133-150). ACRL.
Wellness Support for Student Library Employees

A Staff Development Tool Kit for Library Employees Who Supervise Students

Heather Burroughs and Judy Quist

Abstract

There is a growing list of resources for “student wellness” support initiatives on campus, including creating wellness programs in academic libraries such as meditation spaces or therapy animal encounters, as well as comprehensive programming around high-intensity times for student bodies—such as midterms or finals programming. A wealth of resources also exists for library faculty and staff who manage library student employees regarding their hiring, training, and supervision. However, there has been little thought given to the “student-ness” of library student employees and how wellness initiatives might directly relate to their work experience and successful work performance as part of their overall wellness on campus. In this chapter, we will explore the recommended structure of campus “student wellness support” programs and translate it into an appropriate tool kit of resources and staff development suggestions for library student supervisors. We will also recommend techniques for successfully navigating the unpredictability and higher-stakes experience of working with a student employee through a real-life wellness situation.
Introduction

Most often we talk about student wellness initiatives or “students” in the context of the patrons arriving at the service points or receiving instruction from librarians—the student body—but a much rarer conversation is the one around successfully supporting student employee wellness, one that recognizes the dual role supervisors play in the wellness of their student staff.

While wellness programs hosted by the library for the general student body can be valuable (stress-reducing finals programs are a popular initiative for libraries, for example), there is another role for the library in student wellness. All academic library employees should be well versed in the resources on campus that are designed to support student wellness, particularly around mental health, but those who supervise student employees should also be capable of integrating the substance from those resources into their work with the students they supervise. In this tool kit, we provide documents to help student supervisors feel confident in knowing the resources that are available and practice scenarios to help develop confidence in their ability to navigate student wellness issues as they arise among student employees.

This tool kit does not provide resources related to performance management or navigation of managerial issues (the day-to-day work of scheduling or work-performance issues such as tardiness), though those managerial skills will be the groundwork for navigating the student wellness matters, and we will touch on similar topics (such as documentation of incidents). Some suggested resources for how to manage performance of library employees are *Mentoring and Managing Students in the Academic Library* by Michelle Reale, *Complete Guide for Supervisors of Student Employees in Today’s Academic Libraries* by David A. Baldwin and Daniel C. Barkley, and *Managing Student Assistants: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* by Kimberly Burke Sweetman.

We have chosen to focus on foundational areas surrounding institutional resources, US federal requirements that will likely impact your institution’s policies and procedures around these areas, some thoughts on navigating the initial interaction when a student discloses a wellness issue, some practice scenarios, and thoughts on how to appropriately and sensitively document and communicate out wellness issues as they resolve. There are many trainings, resources, and programs related to wellness topics that can be directly applied to how student supervisors navigate the wellness of their student employees, several of which we mention here; however, the list we provide in this tool kit is far from exhaustive.
Resources at Your Institution: What Are They? Where Are They?

Before getting started, there is some information you should gather about your college or university. Consider the answers to the following questions. You may want to create a resource sheet with this information so you have quick access to it.

1. Do you have a college or university police force? What is the nonemergency contact information for that office?
2. If you do not have a college or university police force, then with what police department does your college or university security staff liaise? Who will respond to an emergency situation? Can you contact them directly, or do you need to go through your campus security office?
3. What other services do campus police or campus security provide? For example, does your campus have any safety or security apps (such as LiveSafe, CampusSafe, Circle of 6, EmergenSee, LifeLine Response, MyForce, etc.)?
4. Does your campus have any sort of emergency notification system campus-wide (Rave Alert, Everbridge Aware, e2Campus, etc.)? How do you subscribe to these systems?
5. Do you have a central campus dispatch line that will direct your call to other campus services (maintenance, alarm testing, etc.)?
6. Do you have a sexual assault prevention program (SHARPP or other office)? Where is it? What are its hours? How do you contact it? If you do not have an office like this on your campus, is there one in the community students can go to? Does your campus have any apps that offer support in this area (uSafeUS, for example)?
7. Do you have a behavioral health or behavioral intervention team or organization on campus? (These teams may go by many names: BIT, BAT, CAT, SIT, CARE, etc. For more information about these teams check the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association’s website at https://www.nabita.org.) If you do, who is on that team? How can you contact team members (group email address, phone number, web page)?
8. Do you have a Title IX office? Where is it located? What are its hours? How do you contact it? If you do not have a Title IX office, who is your designated Title IX officer? Where are they located? How do you contact them? Is there a confidential way for students to report issues to the Title IX office?
9. What other resources are available on your campus and what are their hours and contact info? Do you have any of the following: health and wellness offices, counseling services academic assistance, tutoring, financial aid, payroll offices, veterans affairs, accessibility services, or diversity support programs?

Examples of training programs recognized nationally in the US that could be of use on your campus (other countries may have similar or equivalent programs) are

- Kognito training
- QPR training
- Safe Zone training
- Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator
- SOCIAL STYLE training (TRACOM Group)
- Resilience Training (TRACOM Group)
- US National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255); and online chat: [https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

As academic library employees, it is likely that library student supervisors will already have received information or training regarding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). It is essential that student supervisors understand the details of this act and its intent, as the law requires them to comply. Before we explain how this law relates to student wellness, we will give a brief overview of the law itself. More detail regarding FERPA is available via the US Department of Education website, and most universities in the United States have their own documentation and policy materials regarding FERPA.

FERPA revolves around the protection of student education records for any school receiving funds from the US Department of Education. With the exception of students still being claimed as dependents by a parent or guardian, all students working in academic libraries, having entered postsecondary education (regardless of age), will hold those protective rights themselves. (Prior to students turning eighteen or enrolling at a post-secondary school at any age, these rights were given to their parents or guardians.) These rights include a student’s ability to request access to education records relating to them, as well as the ability to request the amendment of such records if the they believe them to be inaccurate or misleading, and the right to require written consent before a school discloses personally identifiable information from their education records.²

There are several exceptions to the last, several of which we will focus on because they are most directly related to students working in libraries and to the idea of student wellness. The first is that a school may disclose information to

school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official typically includes a person employed by the [School] in an administrative, supervisory, academic, research, or support staff position (including law enforcement unit personnel and health staff); a person serving on the board of trustees; or a student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee. A school official also may include a volunteer or contractor outside of the [School] who performs an institutional service of function for which the school would otherwise use its own employees and
Wellness Support for Student Library Employees

who is under the direct control of the school with respect to the use and maintenance of PII from education records, such as an attorney, auditor, or collection agent or a student volunteering to assist another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official typically has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibilities for the [School].

Thus, academic library employees, including student employees, may have access to student education records as part of their jobs without needing consent from the student. This information is often further protected by US state laws regarding library record confidentiality, which generally protect patron records and other information student employees are exposed to. As library employees familiar with such privacy protections for patron records, it is likely easy to understand this aspect of FERPA, which allows library employees to do work that requires access to student information without need for consent from students to work with that information.

However, the other piece of FERPA that relates directly to library student employees and library student supervisors (which may be less obvious in reading the basics of the law) is that FERPA’s protected “student educational records” also include the records related to the employment of students who are both enrolled at a university and also employed by that university. With the exception of library student supervisors, who are allowed to work with that information for their own professional purposes, student employment records (including records of hiring, disciplinary action, firing, etc.) are not allowed to be shared with anyone without the student’s consent. A library student supervisor may be asked by a student’s parent for information about their child who is an applicant or current student employee, for example; however, releasing this information is not allowed without consent of the student since the protection provided by FERPA becomes the student’s once they enroll in a postsecondary school.

While parents and others are generally unable to obtain this information due to these rights, there are additional exceptions to FERPA that relate to student employees more specifically with regard to wellness and safety, including the stipulation that information may be shared without the student’s consent if one of the following applies:

- to inform “appropriate officials in connection with a health or safety emergency.”
- to alert “parents of a student regarding the student’s violation of any Federal, State, or local law, or of any rule or policy of the school, governing the use or possession of alcohol or a controlled substance if the school determines the student committed a disciplinary violation and the student is under the age of 21.”
- “to a victim of an alleged perpetrator of a crime of violence or a non-forcible sex offense, subject to the requirements of § 99.39. The disclosure may only include the final results of the disciplinary proceeding with respect to that alleged crime or offense, regardless of the finding.”
- “if the school determines the student is an alleged perpetrator of a crime of violence or non-forcible sex offense and the student has committed a violation of the school’s rules or policies with respect to the allegation made against him or her.”
Perhaps the most obvious one of these with a tie to wellness is the first, regarding reporting personally identifiable information from a student’s educational records (including student employment records) in the event of a health or safety emergency. This exception allows you to reach out to appropriate individuals in the library or within your university should you have concerns about a student’s behavior or mental health, for example. This also works in conjunction with anyone mandated to report under Title IX (which we will address shortly) should a student disclose a situation that threatens his or her physical or mental health, particularly in situations of sexual misconduct.

A Note Regarding HIPAA

In the United States, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) might come to mind as something library student supervisors may need to consider in the context of wellness, but does HIPAA apply to students employed by a library? The answer is no. Libraries in general are not required to comply with HIPAA because they are not “covered entities” (usually health care providers, health insurance companies, or health care clearinghouses), though they may be part of a larger organization (e.g., a university) that does have certain departments or units that are required to comply with HIPAA standards (e.g., health services, clinics, EMT services). That is not to say that student employee health information or other personally identifiable information is not protected. In situations where a library student employee discloses health information to their supervisor, for example, that information is part of the student’s “education record” and therefore protected by FERPA rules as just described, even if the library is not required to comply with HIPAA.

Understanding Your Role under Title IX

A supervisor is often someone who a working college student sees with some regularity and who knows them more personally than many of their professors will. Thus, it is possible a student employee will choose to disclose to you an occurrence or situation that may be causing them distress. The occurrence may or may not be related to the types of work they do or the experiences they’ve had working at the library but will most definitely be related to their overall wellness as a student at your college or university. Different types of occurrences or situations may require you to contact different offices or groups on campus. It is important that you understand what your responsibility, if any, is for communicating information to specific offices on campus and if there are any time requirements attached to reporting.

Title IX is shorthand for Title IX of the United States’ Education Amendments of 1972. The contents can be found on the US Department of Justice website: [https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix-education-amendments-1972](https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix-education-amendments-1972). With regard to student wellness—particularly in relation to sexual misconduct that affects a student’s physical safety as well as their mental health—you should understand your responsibilities as outlined by your college or
university. If you are unfamiliar with Title IX (or equivalent laws in your country if outside the US) reporting at your institution, there are some factors and questions you will want to explore to be sure you are meeting your college's or university’s criteria for reporting.

Your institution’s broad obligation and responsibility under Title IX as it applies to sexual violence is as follows:

- Once a school knows or reasonably should know of possible sexual violence, it must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred.
- If sexual violence has occurred, a school must take prompt and effective steps to end the sexual violence, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects, whether or not the sexual violence is the subject of a criminal investigation.
- A school must take steps to protect the complainant as necessary, including interim steps taken prior to the final outcome of the investigation.
- A school must provide a grievance procedure for students to file complaints of sex discrimination, including complaints of sexual violence. These procedures must include an equal opportunity for both parties to present witnesses and other evidence and the same appeal rights.
- A school’s grievance procedures must use the preponderance of the evidence standard to resolve complaints of sex discrimination.
- A school must notify both parties of the outcome of the complaint.

Where, then, does your library and your role as a student supervisor in your library fit into this broad set of responsibilities? As a supervisor of students, you may have some institutional obligations, as well as obligations to your students, which are outlined by the US government and interpreted by your institution.

To understand your obligations as college or university employee, consider and find answers to the following:

- Many, but not all, colleges and universities designate all employees as mandatory Title IX reporters. Has your institution done this?
  - Are there guidelines that define who must report? (For example, are employees who supervise or have authority over students required to report, but others may not be?)
  - If so, be sure you understand whether or not your role as a student supervisor (even if you’re not in an outward facing unit that interacts with patrons) meets this criterion. If this is a job expectation at your institution, it should be clearly communicated to you.

* This is a controversial question, particularly as it relates to teaching faculty and to a shared governance faculty role at a college or university, and institutions can sometimes elect to require a narrower group of employees to be responsible for mandatory reporting (often called “responsible employees,” a phrase borrowed from and outlined in the 2011 “Dear Colleague Letter” from the Office for Civil Rights). Additionally, because they are not law, governmental best practice recommendations on this topic may fluctuate over time. For example, there currently are new interim guidelines that rescind much of the 2011 and 2014 Dear Colleagues Letters. Your institution may elect to adjust employee requirements as recommendations changes, or it may maintain consistent requirements despite these fluctuations. It is most important to have clarity around what your institution expects of you.
If your institution requires mandatory reporting from all employees, or from an employee group that you belong to, do you have an office for or position you are required to report Title IX violations to? (If you are unsure, your equity or equal opportunity office might be a good place to start.)

- If you do have a Title IX office or Title IX officer, does the option exist to report through other channels, such as your direct supervisor or another designated office, or must you report directly to that office or Title IX officer to meet your mandatory reporting guidelines? (You may not have not fulfilled your required reporting unless you follow a specific protocol and speak with certain people.)
- Is there an option available on campus to report anonymously? Does this fulfill the mandatory reporter responsibility? (This may be acceptable only for student use.)

- Is there a required time frame that is mandated for prompt reporting (twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours, etc.)?
- What are the consequences if you fail to report or fail to report within the predeter

Consider the following obligations you may have to your students as a student superv

- If you are a mandatory reporter, it is important that your student employees know that you are a one and what that means. It is best to make this fact plain in writing in orientation materials you may provide and remind them during training sessions. This is knowledge they should have before they decide to disclose something to you.

- If a student reports something to you that falls under Title IX guidelines, you will need to let the student know that you must report it to other offices on campus. You can offer to stay with the student if and when they speak with staff from other offices.

- If reporting is needed, and depending on your institution's procedures, you may start either with contacting your Title IX officer or with calling your campus police office. If it is not an emergency, try its direct number and let the police office know what's going on.
  - Often campuses have a centralized dispatch line for nonemergency police needs, maintenance, or alarm testing purposes. If you have that at your institution, you might start with that number instead of the emergency number. You will likely be asked some questions, and officers may be sent out to speak with the student.

- If the student needs further support, health and wellness, SHARPP, RAINN, counseling services, or other campus (or community) offices may be good resources. Offer to stay with the student while they contact, or walk them over to, the resource they need.
  - It might be a good idea to have someone in your office call ahead to let the office know you are coming with someone who needs resources. This ensures the office will be open and the staff there will be expecting you. It also prevents the student from having to disclose the information in a lobby or more open space.
• Once the student’s immediate needs are met, contact your Title IX office or officer and explain what has occurred and what steps you have taken so far.
  – Depending on the circumstances, the Title IX officer may ask you for a plan for when your student returns to work. Be prepared to consider what steps you can take to help your student feel safe when they return. Think about questions like these: Will there need to be adjustments in responsibilities? Changes in work hours? Will the student need extra support? Someone to check in with them regularly?
• Using whatever method is required by your campus or what works best for your library or department, document the situation and the steps you took to resolve it (refer to our recommendations for how to document later in this chapter if you do not currently have a system).
  – Think about who needs this information and how much information they need. Some offices may need documentation with a lot of detail, but staff members in your area might need only general details to help support your student. You may need to document the situation several different ways. Always keep the student’s privacy in mind and share only enough information to provide appropriate context.
• Quietly check in with your student when they return to work. Let them know they can come to you with any follow-up issues, be sure they clearly understand any plans or adjustments that you’ll be making to support them—and follow up to be sure those adjustments are working.

Sympathy and Empathy in Student Supervision

Though we often hear and use the words sympathy and empathy, particularly when working with student employees on college campuses, the definition of such words can become circular or confusing. Sometimes one is used as a synonym for the other, but other times it is stressed that they are not the same. For the purposes of this chapter we will consider empathy as being a heightened form of sympathy, reflecting more emotional engagement in a student-related issue or challenge. We would like to use this accepted connotation to present a framework for how to think about your involvement in day-to-day student management (tardiness issues, performance issues, etc.) versus your involvement in managing a wellness issue that occurs with one of your student employees. Feel free to substitute other words that seem more directly connected to your organization’s value system for sympathy or empathy if they fit better for you.

In our experience, a student supervisor will be sympathetic to the work issues or complications that arise from supervising people generally but will also be sympathetic to the issues or complications that arise from supervising student employees specifically (in a way that might be different from an employee manager outside of an academic setting). Though you understand and can provide internal tools to help them resolve issues related to work performance or the work-life balance of being a student and a library employee
(for example, academic pressure at certain times of year), you likely will expect them to resolve the issue themselves using these basic tools you have previously laid out in a way that meets the job performance expectations for your library around attendance, job performance, or other business needs. Examples of this might be requiring them to find a replacement for a shift they can't work and having a system to request substitutes for shifts that they need to take off for social or academic reasons, or a communication protocol they must initiate and follow if they experience unexpected sickness or need to reduce their work schedule temporarily due to academic pressure. You may ultimately help in reaching a resolution (e.g., excusing someone from the last shift before a holiday break due to their travel needs), but this is usually after they have attempted to take several steps to resolve the issue independently. If it is a job performance issue, you might issue a warning and provide an additional training session or two but will ultimately rely on the student to find a way to meet the expectation or initiate communication with you for why they are unable to do so.

When it comes to issues of wellness, however, it is our experience that there is often a need for more heightened involvement in working through the steps toward a resolution of the issue or situation at hand. This requires a more empathetic response. You will very likely play a larger role in supporting and guiding them through these steps toward resolution and may have more involvement in the eventual outcome than you would for a work performance situation. You will see in many parts of this tool kit that not only do we endorse having knowledge of the wellness resources at your institution readily at hand, but also frequently recommend that (based on the comfort level of your student, of course) your involvement level stay relatively high, even after you have connected your student to those tools and resources.

In several places in this tool kit, we have suggested that you ask your student if they would like you to sit with them while they call a specific resource, or if they would like you to walk them to the appropriate campus resource. You may even find your student looking to you to initially help facilitate the conversation between them and the appropriate campus resource or officer (though if you go this route, you should encourage the student to communicate their experience directly when they feel comfortable doing so and at that point remove yourself from the conversation). If you must make any accommodations or arrangements in the workplace after your student returns to their library position, you will want to be sure those are communicated in clear detail to the student so they know what support to expect and what they do or don’t have to share with other colleagues, and—keeping your student’s privacy in mind—you will likely want to provide your work colleagues with only as much information and context as they need to help support these accommodations (for more on this, see the section on documentation). You should also check in with your student frequently as they settle back in to be sure these adjustments are working for them.

Some students (or some situations) may not need you to be as deeply involved as others, and it’s important to let the student experiencing the issue determine how much (or how little) support they need initially and for you to be calm, collected, and confident in your ability to help them access the support they need, even if you feel unsure or uneasy yourself.
A Note about Outcomes

In all outcomes, it is important that you maintain appropriate boundaries for yourself in relation to your student employees and that you return to your sympathetic supervisory role as soon as reasonably possible and remove yourself from the deeper empathetic role you may have played while the situation was unfolding. Advice you give student employees should be strictly related to getting them to the resources they need that are qualified to address these issues. Students should not feel as though you are their parent or therapist, and you should not provide advice that is outside of your training. Additionally, students should not feel as though you are inappropriately prying into their personal lives.

In cases where the student must leave their position at your library or perhaps withdraws from school, you may never know the ultimate outcome of the situation with which you assisted. Or you may know that an issue was resolved, but the student may choose not to share the outcome with you. This may feel frustrating, but laws, mandates, or the privacy preferences of those involved may preclude your knowledge of the outcome. While you should have enough information to implement any necessary accommodations for your student, we would advise you not to seek out information just for the sake of knowing it, both out of respect for your student employees and to prevent any possible unconscious bias in the future.

There may also be cases where a student becomes over-interested in sharing additional details with you. Should this happen, we’d recommend that you treat this as a wellness issue as well—and recommend options such as campus counseling or health and wellness offices to provide that continued support. If the over-interest issues extend to a desire to develop a more social rapport with you because of your role in a previous situation and you feel that it is crossing into inappropriate territory, you may want to address this as a work performance issue instead of a wellness issue, depending on the circumstances.

Reporting Process and Flowchart

While you may have clear guidelines or expectations for both the supervisor and the supervisee in terms of work performance, you may not have as robust a training program for managing issues of student wellness, or you may find your training revolves more around wellness for your patrons. Most libraries have customer service trainings and tools for how to deal with difficult patrons, processes around library fine forgiveness, policies around food or emotional support animals in library spaces, and so on. However, because your student employees are students first, they are just as likely to encounter difficulties or experience wellness issues as your student patrons are, and you, as a student supervisor, may be the first staff contact point for a wellness issue one of your student employees is experiencing. Situations brought to you that are related to the “student-ness” of your student employees can be uncomfortable or confusing if you do not have a clear process to follow, and the best way to feel confident in handling them is practice. In order to demystify the experience and allow for some practice opportunities, we have included a process flowchart (figure 7.1) that outlines some of the basic procedural directions, and
several test scenarios to use with the flowchart. You will need to know some basics about how student wellness services are set up and what the rules are for mandatory reporters at your college or university in order to tailor this flowchart to your specific library. The practice scenarios are generic student wellness conversations and do not in any way represent actual cases or people. They should be used with the flowchart and may be worked through individually, as a group, or as an opportunity to role-play some practice conversations that might occur.

**Practice Scenarios**

**Situation 1:** Student employee X seems to be having trouble completing tasks and is not paying attention at work today. You speak to them about their work performance, and they apologize and say they are distracted because they are worried about their roommate. As the conversation progresses, employee X shares that their roommate’s brother died and that they were very close. The roommate has been talking in a way that makes employee X concerned that they might hurt themselves, and this morning the roommate seemed especially troubled.

**Situation 2:** Student employee E comes to you and asks not to work nights anymore even though the bulk of the student’s shifts are in the evening. During the conversation, employee E discloses to you that they were sexually assaulted at a weekend party and are now uncomfortable walking home in the dark.

- What if employee E discloses that they were sexually assaulted at work? Does that change what you would do?
- Or if they reveal they were sexually assaulted by someone who isn’t a student at the university?

**Situation 3:** Student employee R emails you and asks if it is possible not to work any shifts with student employee M going forward. You ask employee R in to discuss what’s going on, and employee R discloses that employee M regularly skips out of shifts and is constantly on their phone answering texts when they should be reshelving books.

- Employee M is an average employee who misses a lot of shifts at the last minute because of social engagements. When you speak to employee M about it, they offer no explanation for this behavior.
- Or employee M is an excellent employee who is always engaged at work. When you speak to employee M about it, they say they are very behind on their homework right now, and they have been texting with a tutor to try and get caught up.
- Or employee M is generally a good employee, but you have noticed a lot of new behaviors this year—absences from work, distraction, shorter temper than usual, and so on. This new information from employee R seems to be another new behavior.

**Situation 4:** A student patron contacts you to complain that student employee J has been harassing them and they are concerned about using the library if employee J is there. The student says they have a case pending with the conduct and mediation office, but they
want to know when employee J works, so they can stay out of the library during that time. This is the first you’ve heard of this complaint.

**Situation 5:** Student employee Y has been a no-show for several shifts. You have gone through all the steps in your institution’s employee disciplinary system (warnings, etc.) and have had to let student employee Y go.

- Student employee Y has since shown up at service points and in your office three times, making comments about how unfair the process was and arguing about the dismissal. Each time the intensity of the interaction has increased.
- Or student employee Y has not been in contact, but student employee Y’s father has called you asking for information as to why his child has been dismissed from this job.
- Or either student employee Y or employee Y’s father has forgone contacting you but has contacted the dean, head, or director of your library to complain directly to them about the dismissal.

**Situation 6:** Student employee B has not shown up for their shift. Attempts to contact them (email, phone call, etc.) receive no response that day. The next day, there is still no response, and they do not show up for another shift.

## Importance of Documentation

In working through the previous section’s flowchart, it should be clear that the final step after working through whatever scenario you are dealing with is to document what occurred. Documentation is not just for employees with poor performance or for situations that were handled in the context of addressing poor performance; in fact, in many of the practice scenarios, you will have noticed that conversations were initiated outside of any work performance issues. We suggest that, in addition to those situations that you would normally think to document (like performance concerns), any situation you encounter for which you would use an action pattern similar to what is outlined in the flowchart should automatically qualify as needing documentation. While some of the library student management literature we reviewed does mention documentation in the context of performance management, our goal here is to expand upon that to include information about what should be included in documentation that falls outside a standard verbal and written warning structure, as well as to frame documentation in the context of student wellness conversations.

It may be tempting, particularly after working through a sensitive or stressful situation, to put off the documentation because you have already put a lot of time and energy into managing the best possible outcome or because you assume that any campus or off-campus partners who were notified during the situation will take care of the documentation. It is important to resist this temptation and to document what happened (factually from your perspective) immediately or within a very short period. This is important for several reasons:

- Recording the facts of what occurred (especially your own actions) while the details are fresh in your mind will create an accurate written history of events.
Wellness Support for Student Library Employees

- Any on- or off-campus partners brought in to assist in the situation can accurately document only their own actions (once involved) and the fact that you notified them; depending on the severity of the situation (particularly any that involve police, employee dismissal, or anything with potential legal ramifications), it is critical for you to document your exact role and steps that you took in case you are called upon to defend them.

- Documenting what occurred within a short period of time helps set an example for everyone involved to do the same (especially those who will be part of the process in verifying that you’ve documented their parts accurately or writing up their own pieces). If anyone involved is new to such situations, they will also gain valuable experience in understanding and completing the process appropriately with this important final step.

You may be called upon in the future to refer to any documentation to reflect on or defend actions taken or to use experiences to analyze what could have been done differently or what should be done to remain consistent in future situations. For these reasons, your documentation should be written rather than strictly verbal (though perhaps a digital recording could be considered if permitted and appropriate). However, all situations will not require a formal “report form” or need to be brought to the highest levels of the organization. Whether that is necessary will depend entirely on the severity of the situation and, more importantly, on your organization’s rules, regulations, and policies about what gets reported to whom and when. Be sure to consult your own organization’s policy manuals, human resources guidelines, and so on for any requirements (additional forms needing to be filled out or procedures specific to your organization, for example) beyond the basics of recording “who, what, when, where, and why” for the situation you are documenting.

In some minor situations (perhaps an initial conversation with an employee who seems distracted that doesn’t lead to disclosure of a situation requiring initiation of actions the flowchart, for example), an email outlining your conversation to any colleagues who are entitled to know of any conversations with student workers may be appropriate. Such an email can of course be printed later if the situation escalates or it is necessary or required to put a copy in a student’s formal employee file (though we’d suggest this is good practice regardless of the severity of the situation). Of course, each situation is unique and always needs to be handled in accordance with keeping the student’s privacy (and laws like FERPA) in mind. The student may have asked that some information disclosed remain private and thus will not be shared with your colleagues unless you are mandated to do so. As for what information should be documented, following are the critical elements our personal experience has led us to believe should be included:

- What prompted the conversation with the student in the first place? Was this something you approached them about? Did they approach you? Did you overhear it at the service desk? Was this a follow-up to a previous conversation? If so, reference the previous conversation’s date and time and previous verbal and written warnings if it was discipline-related.
Chapter 7

- What were the details of the conversation? Stick to the facts, what you observed, quotes of what was said, and so on rather than making generalizations or stating your opinion of what the student might have been thinking or feeling. When reviewing what you have written, think about how someone who wasn't there would read and interpret what you’ve written and make sure you are conveying facts that you can stand by if questioned.

- What was the date, time, and setting (if important) in which this conversation took place?

- Was a verbal or written warning issued for performance in the midst of this wellness discussion? Even when supporting a student who reveals wellness concerns and directing them to appropriate resources to help resolve the concerns, you will still need to decide if they are meeting work expectations to your satisfaction given the circumstances and whether there will be a resolution that will ensure their success in meeting expectations going forward. There may be situations where letting a student go cannot be avoided because it is clear they are going to be unable to meet expectations for the foreseeable future (e.g., a student who is simply unwilling to seek or accept help from the resources provided despite your best efforts to connect them to the right partners). As with all terminations, it is critical in these situations to document the path your organization used to reach the decision. If there was no verbal or written warning prior to termination, there must be documented evidence that termination was the only option despite the lack of this intermediate step.

- Was anyone part of the conversation other than you and the student? Did you pull in a colleague or another student if there was a conflict being mediated? Document other individuals’ parts in the conversation as well as any action steps they assisted with as part of the outcome.

- Were other campus or off-campus partners contacted because of the conversation? Document who you contacted and any conversations, agreements, or action plans that were made. Copy them on your documentation if policy and law allow, particularly if the student is likely to work with them on the wellness issue more than with you in the future. Document whether the student was made aware that you would be contacting a partner; in some situations, you might consult privately with an appropriate campus partner without alerting the student; in others (such as Title IX situations), the student will know up front contact will be happening.

- Make note of any action steps that were agreed upon with the student and deadlines that were set during the conversation (“student was given until X date to do Y”).

This list loosely translates to the idea that you should be prompting yourself to document something additional for each time you reach a new step on the flowchart of action steps.

In addition, while you may not include this in the documentation that is officially filed, it is also worth exploring (in writing or in conversation with colleagues involved) what went well and, more importantly, what did not go well during your conversation. Did you find that you had the training, resources, and knowledge needed to assist in creating what seemed the best possible outcome of the conversation given the circumstances? If you
were left with questions about whether you took the right actions, whether you referred the student to the appropriate people, and so on, that is another cue that you may want to consult the list of possible training resources from earlier in this chapter to explore opportunities for building skills in this area.

In Conclusion—Using This Tool Kit

We hope that reviewing the resources and techniques in this tool kit has demonstrated the unique role library student supervisors can play in supporting student wellness. By exploring student supervision through a lens of student wellness, we also hope it has helped those who supervise student employees broaden their overall understanding of both student wellness and how a supervisor can contribute positively to the wellness of student employees. We have highlighted how important it is that supervisors of library student employees be well versed in the resources on campus that are designed to support student wellness, particularly around mental health, and that they should be capable of integrating the substance from those resources into their work. We hope the information included here can act as a springboard to help library student supervisors identify where their own strengths are in this area, as well as where additional work is needed in the future. Use the flowchart and practice scenarios on your own, but also use and share them with colleagues in similar roles so they can benefit from discussing how your library should handle these types of situations. A successful network of student wellness support in your own library means educating all student supervisors in what they need to be effective.

Notes

Bibliography


