

# *Training Your Students for the Next Level*

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The lifeblood of any profession is outstanding young people entering the field with desire, enthusiasm and skills. This table topic is designed to help sports information professionals prepare the next generation for this ever-changing field.

When training your students for the next level, the most important thing is setting your students up for success, not failure. Not all student assistants are the same, so, individual instruction and supervision is always a good idea.

I believe there are several important points to observe and maintain. Just as no two students are the same, no two schools are the same.

I have compiled these points over the past few decades and adjusted them to the particular situations that I have encountered. I have divided these points into three categories. I hope they are of help to you.

## **THE STUDENTS**

**1) No Two Students Are Alike** - I believe one of the biggest mistakes that we run into is treating all students the same. I have tried this and, believe me, it does not work. Get to know your students, learn their strengths and weaknesses and proceed from there. I have had great success through the years allowing students to find their niche and excel in that area.

**2) Work Towards Your Student's Strengths** - If you have a student who likes to write and is a good writer, let them write. Same goes with any skills, especially stats and social media. Don't let them do just these things, but definitely make it their "go-to pitch".

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*Presented by:*

**Bill Dyer**  
Associate ACO  
Virginia Tech



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### **3) Weed Out the "Non-Workers" as Soon as Possible**

- I don't want this to sound cruel, but students that do not want to work should not be allowed to just "hang-out" in the office. This is not a clubhouse. If you are here, you are working. Don't take this to mean students who are good workers who may be stopping by between classes. This means the ones that come in for office hours and surf the web or do homework. They won't be moving to the next level, so don't let them take valuable time and opportunities from those who will advance.

**4) Work on Professionalism from Day One** - From the first day on the job, your students are members of your staff and they need to act in a professional manner. It's never too early. Have them introduce themselves to visiting SIDs. Have them interact with any media at the event. Treat them like professionals and let them know your expectations. You would not want someone to recommend a student that is not a professional. Do not do that to someone else in the business.

## THE JOB

**1) Let Students Know that No Job is a Small Job** - If you are going to give a student an assignment, expect and demand that it is done correctly and thoroughly. When they get out into the real world, no one is going to let them skate. This needs to be learned from day one. We all work under deadlines and so should student assistants.

**2) Take Time to Teach** - We are all busy, but the best way to get students prepared to do this work is to teach the correct way from the beginning. I tell the story that when I was an undergraduate, my SID, Rich Murray, took the time to explain the proper way to do every assignment. Of course, in that day and age, it was often teaching me how to run the telecopier, but it all works out the same. Prepare your students for success.

**3) Let Students Get Used to Long Hours** - As we all know, long hours are part of this job. The earlier a student learns and accepts that premise, the better off they are. I find that this often is the best way to weed out those that are not dedicated to this profession.

**4) Students Know More About Technology and Social Media Than You Do** - That is a cold, hard truth that we all must learn. In today's SID Office, the best way to get students engaged and working is often through their knowledge of technology and social media. They can teach you as much as you can teach them. I doubt if there will be any type of position advertised in the future where social media and new technology is not a must. New and unique skills in this area will be great selling points for your students.

**5) Don't Pigeon Hole Your Students** - If you have a student that expresses a desire to get into this profession, you owe it to them to make them as well-rounded as possible. When a student goes looking for an internship/GA position, four years of working men's tennis does them no good. Diversify. We all are looking for versatility.

## THE NEXT LEVEL

**1) Know What Your Students Are Looking For** - Talk with your students. If you believe they have what it takes to go to the next level, ask them, encourage them. Use your skills and contacts to move them along in the profession.

**2) Know What Others Are Looking For** - Keep in contact with others in the profession. We hire interns every year, but it seems every year, we are looking for different skills. This profession has changed so much in the last 10-15 years, what we were looking for in 2000 has no resemblance to what we are looking for today.

**3) Explore All Options** - The worst thing in the world is having a talented, capable and deserving student go into some other field simply because they didn't find the right fit right off the bat. I check the job postings every few days. I keep in contact with others in the area and around the nation. I do a lot of homework for my students (and interns). We owe it to them.

**4) Make Your Office Known as a Place that Produces Outstanding Students** - There are people in this business that, when they call and say they have a student for my internship, I listen. When your students are good workers, year-in and year-out, word gets around. In the end, you are a major part of whether or not one of your students advances to the next level. Be that positive part of their career.

**5) Maintain a Relationship After Your Students Leave** - If you have trained your students well, they will become outstanding members of this profession. They will be able to help you help your students advance. The "old" social network. Encourage your former students to remain active in your office and they will help you in the future.

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