supervising student staff IN A REMOTE ENVIRONMENT

Working remotely was new for many of us when the COVID-19 health crisis sent us to suddenly work from home. The situation and our adaptation to it continues to evolve. As we work with student staff members in this environment, we have the ability to make their working experience a positive one by creating opportunities for flexibility, supporting growth and success, and recognizing the impacts on students’ lives outside of work. As you and the student staff members you supervise adjust to remote work, consider the following:

COMMUNICATE EARLY & OFTEN

On top of a remote working environment, the remote learning environment and the behaviors encouraged to help mitigate the current health crisis are creating a deep sense of isolation for many people. This sense of isolation can make remote workers feel that there is a much slower (or altogether missing) flow of information. It’s also more difficult to share best practices or collaboratively discuss a problem. It is important to over-communicate, especially in the beginning of the remote work transition, to avoid those feelings of social/informational isolation.

Communication is perhaps the trickiest adjustment to make when transitioning to remote work. Make sure students are aware of all the ways that they can reach you and how often you expect them to check in with you.

Have an open conversation about how you both prefer to communicate remotely. Check in periodically to evaluate what is working and what isn’t.

Communicate your expectations with plenty of notice, understanding that tasks may take longer than usual.

Create regular, designated time to connect with students, to both check in about their progress and adjust deadlines when necessary.

Consider meeting over video. Written words only capture one of the key elements of communication, whereas video chat lets us tune in on body language and tone.

Consider utilizing a platform like Slack to encourage frequent communication among team members – this can help students to feel like a part of the team, as well as to connect them to one another.

Don’t forget about recognition and rewards to celebrate students’ strengths and successes!
SUPPORT STUDENTS’ WELL-BEING & MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Student staff members are not only navigating remote work, but also are adjusting to virtual instruction. They may be navigating new living arrangements and family obligations or experiencing anxiety related to the coronavirus pandemic. Our employment status is just one component of our larger identity and of our life, and this is true of student staff members as well.

Check in with yourself about what you expect from your student staff members during this time of remote instruction and remote work.

Be sensitive to what students might be experiencing outside of work. Students are navigating the coronavirus pandemic, images of racial violence and public protest, and a polarized political environment, not to mention personal and familial impacts.

How will you adjust your expectations given the increased mental load that a student might be experiencing?

How can you support a student staff member’s well-being beyond their work role? Some examples of support include daily check-ins, small care packages, increased flexibility with their work schedule, or just taking time to ask, “How are you managing?”

Consider building time into your meetings for those social interactions that would be occurring naturally if you were there in person.

Not sure what a student needs? Just ask! Be patient and keep your virtual office door open!

ENCOURAGE SELF-CARE & BREAKS

While physical distancing and staying at home, much of daily life has moved online. Sitting in front of a computer screen for long periods of time attending classes or completing homework takes a toll on students, and now we’re asking them to work in front of a computer, too.

Encourage students to take breaks during their shifts to step away from the screen and to move their bodies. Model this behavior yourself, too!

You could incorporate a stretch or dance break during meetings, or suggest that students use their break to take a walk around their block or at least move away from the computer.

You may also need to reiterate work boundaries – with less distinction between home and work spaces, students may need reminders that work should be done during their scheduled work hours and that they should log off from work projects when their shift is finished.