Improving Communication between Advisors, Staff, and Student Workers

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Ice Breaker

- Communication: the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs.
  (dictionary.com)

Session approach to Communication

- This session will focus on communication within an office at the macro-level: not communication between individuals in an office
- We will focus on communication between different groups in the office, and how all staff members can stay informed

Session Goals/Objectives

- Identify communication barriers within an office.
- Identify ways to improve office communication.
- Identify 2-3 strategies you can employ to improve your office communication.

Presentation Outline

- Barriers to Effective Communication
  - Case Studies
  - List of barriers
- Office communication strategies/methods
  - ISSS WORLD
  - Other Office Strategies (technical and non-technical)
- Real World Application
  - Small Group Discussion
  - Take Away Materials

Case Study #1

- In recent years, the Study Abroad programs staff was comprised primarily of long-time employees (having worked in the office for 10, 20, 30 years). These individuals possessed a great deal of knowledge, but much of that knowledge left with them upon retirements, transfers, etc.
  - What communication barriers exist in this situation?
  - How can the office set-up systems to ensure that policy decisions (including rationale), details of serious incidents abroad, etc. are recorded for the future?

Case Study #1: Solutions suggested during group discussion

- Continually cross-train staff
- Mentoring
- Create procedures for saving electronic docs
- Assign one staff to be an office “historian”
- Continually document policies & procedures
- Out of office retreats to “check-in” with e/o
- Hold regular meetings to provide updates

Case Study #2

- Regulations and policies for international students and scholars have frequent changes and updates, which need to be communicated to the whole staff so that students are advised accurately.
  - What communication barriers exist in this situation?
  - How can all the staff (advisors, office staff, student workers) be kept up-to-date on the numerous programs and their changes?
  - Who should have what information?

Case study #2: Solutions suggested during group discussion

- Hold weekly staff mtgs. & give updates on regs
- Share responsibility to update info. in all necessary places
- Continually cross check each others' information

Barriers to Effective Communication

(From presentation and group discussion)

- Office Structure/School Structure
- General Office Attitude
- Training
- Schedules and lack of time
- Funding
- Access to Information
- Technological Barriers
- Language Barriers
- Cultural Barriers
  - Different concepts of time
  - Need to "save face"
- Poor Retention
- Loss of knowledge upon retirements, resignations
- Different learning styles
- Generational differences
- Office tradition (it's always been this way)
- Staff "hoarding" knowledge
- Staff split in different physical spaces
- New staff want to change everything
- Info. gets "stuck" with one person
- One person office challenges
- Complexity of Information

ISSS WORLD

(ISSS Workers' Online Resource, Library, and Database)

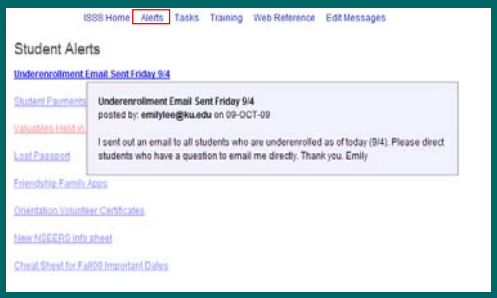
ISSS WORLD – Why?

- Important information was not being relayed to all necessary parties in a timely fashion.
- It was difficult to touch base with student workers on various projects due to schedules.
- Training

ISSS WORLD – Creation and Access

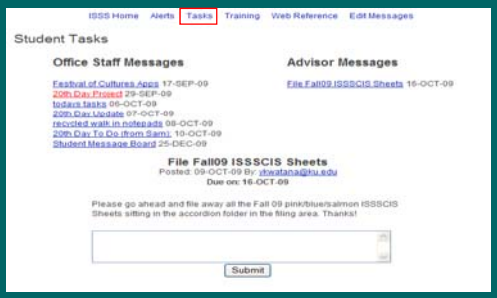
- Creation
  - Interviews
  - Research
  - State of our employee training
  - Worked with our Web Manager to develop the program
- Access
  - Secure log in from our main page
  - Only daily staff, advisors, and a few student worker positions can post alerts, tasks, and quizzes
  - Hourly student workers can only post responses

ISSS WORLD – Alerts Page

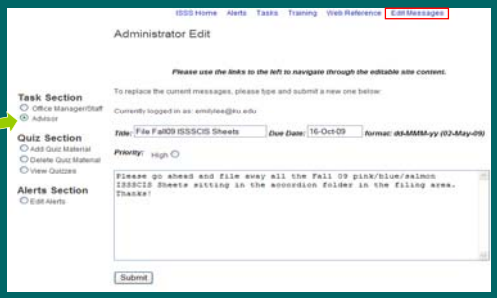


ISSS WORLD – Creating Alerts

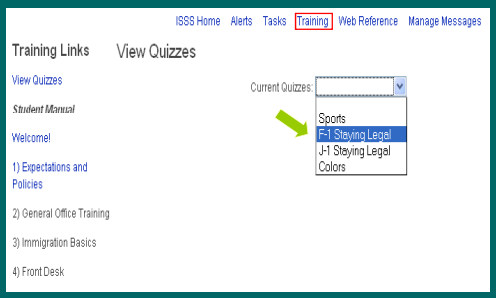
ISSS WORLD – Tasks Page



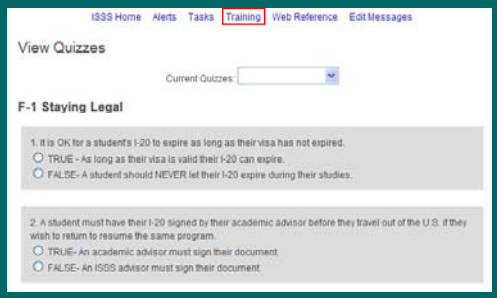
ISSS WORLD –
Creating Tasks



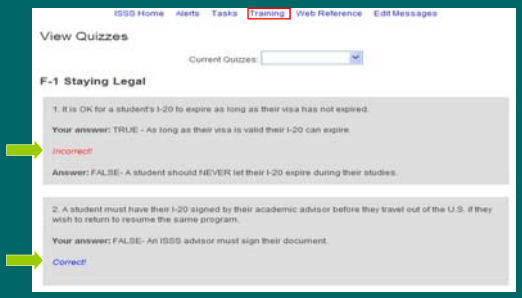
ISSS WORLD –
Quizzes



ISSS WORLD –
Quiz Example

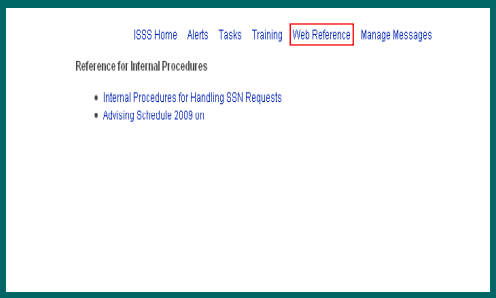


ISSS WORLD –
Quiz Results



ISSS WORLD – Training Manual

ISSS WORLD – Web References



ISSS WORLD – Challenges/Positives

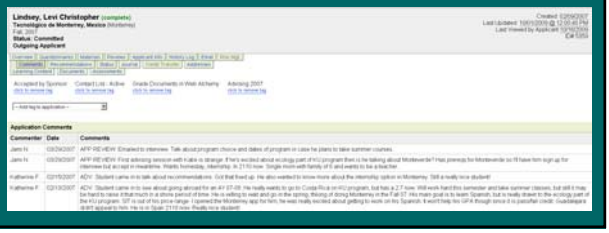
- Challenges
  - Start up bugs
  - Not everyone checks it everyday
  - Postings staying on too long
  - Mainly improves communication with just student workers
- Positives
  - Has improved office knowledge of what is happening
  - Student workers like having tasks & alerts posted so they know what they need to do
  - Has allowed for projects to get done that otherwise would have taken longer to coordinate due to schedules

ISSS WORLD – Future Components

- Student Message Board
- More Editing Capabilities
- Archives

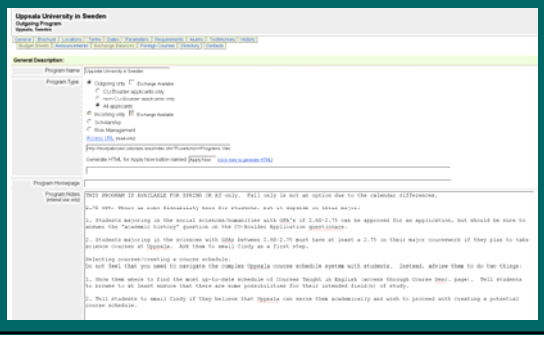
Other Office Strategies

- StudioAbroad – a helpful tool for EA
  - Tracking comments from student visits
  - Tracking program info. not being advertised to public



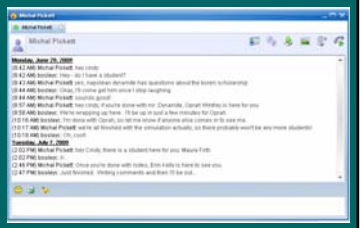
Other Office Strategies

Internal program notes



Other Office Strategies

- Use of IM technology to communicate b/w front & back office
  - Have a clear procedure that is simple, but strictly followed
  - Conduct a simulation



Other Office Strategies

- Staff meetings: waste of time, or efficient use of time?
  - If small groups have regular meetings, the group should have a clear purpose/focus
  - Make an agenda
  - Put someone in charge of running the meeting
  - Take notes (rotate taking turns)
    - Focus on decisions (w/brief rationale) and action items
  - Start meetings on time – don't cater to late-comers

Office-wide vs. individual?

- When analyzing a communication problem, consider whether it is isolated to one individual (or perhaps two individuals), vs. an office-wide problem
- Address individual problems with individuals, rather than implementing all-office changes

Real World Application – Small Group Discussion

- What has worked in your office for improving communication among the various members?
- What has not worked?
- Identify a current or on-going communication problem in your office, and brainstorm possible solutions.
- Report back to whole group on one way you plan to improve communication in your office.

Real World Application: Other solutions from group discussion

- Microsoft Outlook's "task" feature can function as a shared to-do list
- Google docs. can also work well to share info. & track tasks/projects
- Hold regular "check-in" mtgs. where each staff member gives an update
- Schedule mtgs. when staff are most energized

Questions?

Thank you!