

COMPUTER SUPPORT ASSISTS FACULTY, DEVELOPS SKILLS

Photos by Richard B. Crookston



The computer support team assist faculty, staff, and students with their technology-related needs.

Computer support representatives (CSRs) in Religious Education have the unique opportunity and responsibility to assist faculty, staff, and students with their technology-related needs. The mission of the computer support employees is to provide the necessary support for technology-related issues and create a friendly, efficient, and progressive environment that supports the mission of Religious Education. The CSRs offer a wide array of assistance in diverse issues such as hardware replacement, Web programming, e-mail support, and Blackboard course management. The students' fields of study are just as diverse, ranging from engineering to biology, with career aspirations spanning from physician to entrepreneur.

STUDENT CSRS LEARN A VARIETY OF SKILLS WHILE working for Religious Education. Scott Brown, a student CSR, said he was initially afraid he made a mistake in turning down a higher paying job to work here, but after working for two years in Religious Education, he knows he made the right decision. He states, "As a student CSR, I get an opportunity to learn useful skills, build my résumé, and get to know the great faculty that works here. The religion professors are some of the smartest people I've ever met. . . . One of the best parts of the job is just being with great people who work here. They are doing a noble work, and it means something to be a small part of that. It's nice to know that the work we do is making a difference."

This association with professors helps the student employees improve communication skills and become more effective in the professional world. CSR Colin Edwards says, "The experiences and skills obtained

through these opportunities equate to improved communication and professional relations. The ultimate goal of the computer support employees is to create a comfortable atmosphere in which the professors can resolve issues and improve confidence with technology." Fulfilling this ultimate goal requires that the students maintain an open line of communication with the professors and help them understand the technology issues.

The student CSRs really enjoy working with the professors. Matt LeBaron says, "The thing that I love most about this job is the opportunity to work closely with the professors. They are just nice, ordinary people with extraordinary abilities. One of the professors I have worked with always makes my day better. Whenever I ask him how his day is going, he responds, 'Best day ever!' His attitude always brightens my day and reflects the attitude of the entire department." Matt also mentions, "I love

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being able to help people. There is nothing quite like the feeling you get when you succeed in fixing somebody’s problem. There are always frustrating or stressful times, but the feeling that comes after solving someone’s problem makes up for them all.”

In addition to associating with professors, students learn valuable skills as they hone their computer abilities and develop expertise in troubleshooting. “Troubleshooting is a useful skill no matter your profession,” says João Fontoura, a student CSR studying to become a physician. He continues, “Troubleshooting techniques do not change from one field of work to another. The only thing that changes is what you are troubleshooting; this job provides me excellent experience for the future.”

Employment within Religious Education provides student CSRs a great opportunity to work on a variety of projects and problems. A student may be assigned to set up a Web site in PHP to run queries on a MySQL database running on an IIS7 virtualized Windows server and, while working on that project, take support phone calls asking what it means to right click with a mouse. It is a



João Fontoura helping Larry C. Porter in the computer support office.

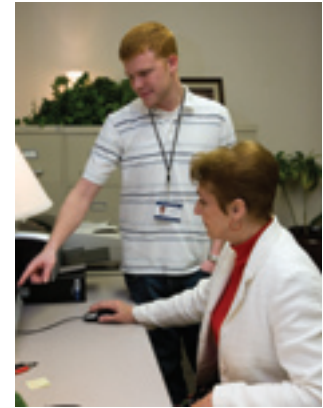
diverse learning experience. Scott Brown states, “While a large part of our time is devoted to helping professors, there’s actually a large range of projects that we’re working on at a given time. . . . We try to be as accommodating as possible to those that need our help. And each day that means something different.

It’s a pretty vague job description, but it also keeps us on our feet. Every day I run into a new problem and learn something new from it. Because of the things I’ve learned here I’ve been able to build my résumé and gain a good deal of experience working in the computer industry.”

Richard Crookston, full-time systems administrator for Religious Education, mentions it is sometimes a challenge to find computer-savvy students with the personality and sociability to work efficiently with professors, staff, and students. He states, “Computer support employees need not only to solve the tasks and problems they are given but also to do it in a manner that reflects the mission of Religious Education.” He adds, “Students who work for Religious Education Computer Support gain not only technical knowledge but also the skills and traits to be successful in any area of employment.”

The students bring considerable skills to the team, but they continue to learn on the job. This growth comes in the form of difficult questions posed by Religious Education’s computer “power users” as well as the challenging projects they are assigned. Students also receive continual training through online resources and department meetings.

For those of the CSR staff going into computer-related professions, this job provides a unique hands-on experience. Ian Shields states, “I love all the cool toys and software. I enjoy helping the professors and students gain a greater understanding of software and hardware capabilities.” Ultimately, each individual that works as a student CSR for Religious Education leaves knowing more about how to be successful and how to make a difference in their future careers, whatever they may be. ✂



Scott Brown assisting Aaronita Openshaw in the seminary training office.