



Self-Help Clinics: A Pragmatic Approach to Student Support

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Overview

In Fall 2003, the Help Desk was swamped by computers left by students for service, and students were scared, angry, confused and often annoyed about why their computers were "broken" and at a loss about how to fix them. The Self-Help Clinic emerged as one solution, in keeping with our underlying principles: Customer Service, Education, and Technical Strategies. For information about educational companions to the clinics; see "Fear Factor and American Idol: Leveraging Popular Culture for Student Support," NERCOMP Track 5, March 22, 3:10 pm.

The objective of the Simmons' Self-Help Clinic is to educate and enable Simmons community members, particularly students, in the management of their own technology. Attendees sign a release, acknowledging that Help Desk staff will provide guidance (a free service), but that attendees are responsible for their own computers and for the work done during the clinic. Clinics are held 3 times each week, by two technicians for up to seven attendees.

Simmons College

- Undergraduate women's college, founded 1899
- Five graduate schools:
 - College of Arts & Sciences
 - Graduate School of Library and Information Science
 - School for Health Studies
 - School of Management (women only)
 - School of Social Work
- Undergraduates: 1,800
- Graduate students: 2,500
- Students living on campus: 1,300
- Faculty and staff: 930
- Simmons-owned computers: 1,500

Help Desk

This poster is based on "Oh No! They Want Me to Support Students' Computers...?" SIGUCCS '05, November 6-9, 2005, Monterey, California, Copyright 2005 ACM 1-59593-173-2/05/0011.

The Problem: Fall 2003

Students	Help Desk
Machines overcome by malware	Overwhelmed by students and their computers
Ports turned off for filesharing / traffic	Unwritten policy: we do not support students
Unsure how to fix / what to do	Priorities: unable to assist faculty & staff
Unsure what service to expect	Result: bad customer service for everyone

Lack of: written policies, setting clear expectations

Release Form

- Reminder: this is a free service
- Owner is responsible: stay with your computer, do the work yourself
- We provide: the best guidance and advice we can
- We are not responsible if something goes wrong
- Warning: these tasks could be time consuming and boring, but are necessary to fix your computer

What Happens at the Clinic

- Those who pre-register are attended to first
- One technician per three attendees
- Most come because of malware or port was quarantined
- Run Defender, Adaware and possibly Spybot in safe mode
 - Reboot to regular mode and run safety.live.com
 - If computer is still ill, run Panda Active Scan or Trend Micro
- Once scans verify the machine is clean, port is taken out of quarantine

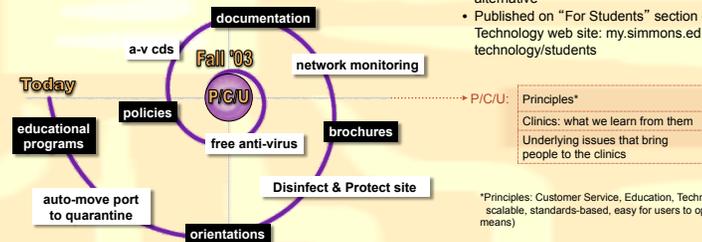
One Solution: Self-Help Clinic

- Specified hours during which we assist students
- Release from liability
- Students drive, not technicians
- Purpose: education, not just remediation
- Students register
- Primary constituency: students, but open to all computer owners
- Clinic goes virtual: CDs to students over summer; all online at my.simmons.edu/disinfect-protect

Integral to the Solution: Policy Process

- Creating policies that staff would adhere to and would be fair to students required:
 - negotiating with staff
 - vetting with student government, Technology Governance Committee
- Had to convince staff: the only way to say "no" (ever so politely) is to set expectations, stick to what you've said, and be backed up by management
- Our message to students:
 - We're here to help you troubleshoot and fix your own computer.
 - We provide guidance; only in exceptional circumstances will we touch hardware.
- Recommend for-fee external vendor as alternative
- Published on "For Students" section of Technology web site: my.simmons.edu/technology/students

Clinics in Context



Ongoing Challenges

- Students are bringing more technology to campus
- Malware ever more sophisticated
- Expectations will always be higher than the amount of service we can provide
- Education is difficult to transmit when the computer is broken
- Clinics are not scalable