Assembling the pieces for a successful simulation center

© 2013 American College of Surgeons
1.1 | Staffing and Salaries
**Intent**

The purpose of this section is to provide general guidance when staffing your centers, what types of positions to consider, and creative staffing solutions.

---

### Staffing and Salaries

Staffing a surgical skills center is challenging and unpredictable. The staffing choices you make will ultimately determine the type of center you develop, so it is important to take the time to evaluate your center, determine its needs, examine its potential strengths and weaknesses, and review its types of support. Many centers have fluctuating schedules that revolve around a well-defined academic year, complete with intermittent breaks and slower summer and holiday seasons. Due to this variable schedule, staffing the correct number of full-time, part-time, and actual staff can be daunting. In the next few paragraphs, we offer some information and advice to help with your decision making.

#### HOW BUSY ARE YOU?

Many new centers see low levels of use. Until a firm foundation and course load is established, they can initiate their staffing with small numbers and then continue to monitor and grow staff as needed. It is important to review your center’s productivity and income each year to ensure proper staffing levels and make calculated staffing increases. Depending on the size of your center, starting with two staff members will likely be sufficient to get started. Because these initial staff numbers are so low, it is important to hire experienced and well-rounded staff that work well individually and require little to no training. Many centers hire experienced nurses, vet techs, and operating room technicians to fill these formative positions. Beyond the basic qualifications for these staff members, look for people who understand technical language, have excellent time management skills, are conducive to shift hours, and work well under pressure.

Once your lab begins to establish itself, you may want to hire a dedicated information technology (IT) professional or IT team. All labs are inundated with computers, software, and other audio visual components, including numerous computer and human patient simulators. IT specialists have the knowledge and expertise to handle complex technology issues including procurement, installation, maintenance, updates, and more. Many IT people tend to work well in other technology areas such as audio visual services, monitor maintenance, computer presentations, and sound and lighting. Also, do not underestimate the amount of data collection required of your center. Be it evaluations, exams marks, population trends, or inventory capture, an IT specialist will be your best resource to streamline all of your technology areas and help you find the right solutions to your center’s unique challenges.
Once your center’s usage begins to increase, you may need to consider hiring a business manager. Maintaining up-to-date financial books, managing invoices, and ensuring accounts payable and receivable are in good standing are essential tasks at any center. As labs become busier, these tasks can become increasingly difficult to manage and easy to neglect. Many centers have the added luxury of an in-house finance department to manage funds, but this department often functions on a macro level rather than on day-to-day tasks. When you are absorbed in a large financial domain, it can be difficult to retain your autonomy and remain on top of your transactions. Regular reviews of the center’s financial status are important for keeping your books in the black. Hiring a dedicated business manager for your center can ensure these important financial details are dealt with properly.

For all of three positions it is important that the individuals hired possess high levels of communications skills, team-player attitudes, creativity, and patience. Since most centers support few staff members, it is important that cross coverage is accepted and that all job positions are flexible.

**OPTIONAL STAFFING**

Depending on how your lab evolves, other staffing options include undertakers, funeral directors, international medical graduates, teachers, research scientists, anatomists, medical students, and hospital service assistants.

If your lab has no plan to utilize cadaveric specimens, then an undertaker will not be a priority pick. If you know that your lab will focus on research in education, a researcher will be an important addition to your staff.

It is important to periodically review your lab’s areas of strength and weakness to determine best staff fits over time.

**FREE OR NEARLY FREE**

If your lab is under financial constraints but in need of additional resources, you may want to consider offering volunteer opportunities and/or employing co-operative education students. These relationships can be mutually beneficial, as the center receives much-needed day-to-day help and students are rewarded with the opportunity of a bird’s-eye view in the life of a health care worker.

Co-op students are a rigorous group—they come to the lab with a full package of insurance coverage, a co-op teacher, and a precise set of learning objectives. This group also runs on a fixed schedule of set dates and times, which is helpful for staffing consistency. They are instructed to put a year-end final project together based on their learning objectives, which bodes well for good attendance records and vested interest in consistent lab use.

Volunteers are also a good choice but they will need more management in regards to commitment and availability. Most institutions have an established formula for hiring volunteers to ensure that the volunteers are well documented, have a current CV (curriculum vitae), have cleared hospital protocols, and complete a documented orientation. As part of your appreciation for lab commitment, your staff should be prepared to provide letters of support or reference letters for volunteer efforts. A thank you card and/or gift card are also appropriate forms of appreciation. If you have been lucky enough to have outstanding student volunteers, you may want to consider adding them to your employee roster as paid part-time workers. Many labs are shorthanded during vacations/holidays or simply busy times. Having a pool of trained part-time workers is a beneficial back-up plan to cover special events.

**HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)**

Most centers are governed by a human resources department that works with them on a regular basis. It is important that you meet with your representative to review the hiring processes that your center must follow. For example, most centers must publicly post positions and follow a formal interview process prior to hiring. In addition to providing hiring guidelines, your HR department will also be helpful in establishing rates of pay, giving you comparable salaries, and guiding you on the best fit rate for your potential hire. If you are a unionized unit, it is even more important that you bring in the HR group early to ensure you are following collective agreement contracts.

Also of note, it is important that you are aware of any general HR policies or protocols that must be followed. In particular, employee records are audited regularly by health and safety groups. With this in mind, you must be aware of the maximum hours of overtime allowed
Chapter 1 | Expenses

1.1 | Staffing and Salaries

by your institute. For example, under health and safety rules our institute allows a maximum of 13 hours overtime (OT) in a two-week period. Consider overtime as a factor when booking events on evenings or weekends with your full-time staff. Perhaps utilize your part-time staff in conjunction with one or two full-time staff members. Another factor to consider is the hiring of staff that already work and are on your institute’s payroll. Many institutes do not allow employees to work concurrently in two cost centers in the same institute. This restriction is due to the possibility of double dipping as well as collective agreement issues. Consult your HR representative to ensure you are following all proper protocols.

Salaries

It should go without saying that the variability in wages is wide. Common sense will tell you that the more experienced and higher educated a person is, the higher the wage or salary that person will merit. If your hiring budget is limited, you may be able to bargain a lower annual salary by offering alternative compensation perks such as increases in vacation time during slow periods, free parking or public transportation passes, or days off in lieu of extra hours for those on fixed salaries.

For staff that is not at a management level, you need to inquire as to what your obligations are in paying overtime salaries. Most institutes are required to pay overtime either at time and one half or time in lieu. This will all need to be reviewed with your HR department. No matter who you hire, be aware that you will be obligated to pay some sort of benefits package amount and those costs will have to be reflected in your hiring budget. At our institute we must add 27 percent to our full-time employee salary budget for benefits (for example, a $50,000 salary will be a $63,500 budget). Ask your HR department what your obligations are for benefits.

Remember, when you underpay employees, they don’t work as hard and often leave for other opportunities. Be fair and equitable and you will not only offer job satisfaction but gain employees who feel valued. In the end, doing so will contribute to job longevity, dedication, and low rates of attrition.