Teaching Public Computer Classes

This information was requested by Virginia Patrick-Downs, Reference Librarian, Pikes Peak Library District, who posted the following inquiry to Libnet and Publib on September 7, 2005:

> "We are hoping to get some feedback on what some of you are doing as far as teaching public computer classes, such as basic computers, the Internet, web based mail, and Microsoft Word in your library for patrons."

Twelve public libraries responded to the email sent to both Libnet and Publib in which we wanted to explore how other libraries were handling various issues (listed below) public computer classes.

From the 12 responses we received, five were from Colorado; Centennial, Durango, Englewood, Fort Collins, and Greeley and five were from other states.

The following is a list of issues with responses and respondents listed:

Do you have trouble with patrons signing up for your classes and not attending or canceling at the last minute? **If you have or have had the above situation, what do you do to avoid patrons canceling your classes?**
Responses:
We only have 12 spots (a computer for each patron) so signups is not a problem. We do tend to have anywhere from 1-3 no shows per class. To help keep seats full, we take waiting list names and advise them that if there are open seats they are welcome to be in the class.   *Cynthia Kiyotake*   *Adult Services Supervisor*   *Koelbel Public Library*   *Centennial, Com*
Yes. It's a constant problem. I confirm their registration within a few days of sign up either by email or by mail. I contact everyone in the class again one or two days prior to each class to remind them. I tell them at each class session that they need to attend classes that they've signed up for or to release their spot at least 1 week prior to the class so that others on the waiting list can attend.   *E. Carolyn White, Electronic Resources Librarian*   *Durango Public Library*   *Durango, CO*

"We want to enable some users to register for our classes via the internet so our Web Master is developing a form that would confirm registration and also tell patrons if there is a waitlist. We are still in the developments stages with that."

We DO have people constantly not turn up. I have tried a few things -- ringing to confirm their attendance a few days before the event – this takes time though, and I have restricted it to the most popular classes such as Excel. We have considered making a small charge to their library card say $5 so that if they register it is THEIR responsibility to cancel – we are still looking at that.

We also take names for a waiting list but encourage patrons on the wait list to 'just turn up' on the day although there is no guarantee of a place there is a chance that a place will be available. This works to take a seat, get the handouts and watch the class on a smart board projector; at the Main we have a very small lab and this is not possible. So far this 'turn up and take a chance' has worked well with patrons."

Pamm Clements
Technology Training &
Reference Librarian
Fort Collins Public Library - Fort Collins, CO

"Yes – this is always a problem and I'm not sure there is anyway around it. Free classes at the library are not top priority with most people. We have tried calling, mailing postcards, etc. and I think it does not really help. At Smoky Hill, I used to let people sign up no more than one week in advance in the hopes that it would stay in the front of their brain. Always tell your waitlisted people to stop by and they might be able to jump in at the last minute."

Jill Corrente – has taught computer classes for Arapahoe Library District for the past 6 years
Arapahoe Library District
12855 E. Jamison Circle
Englewood, CO 80112

"We used to have sign up for our classes, and we would have people who didn't show, despite being called and reminded the day of or the day before the class. This summer, we decided to change the format of our classes, and now they are drop-ins, on a first come first served basis. Most of the classes have 5-8 people. (We have two labs – one seats 6, the other 8.) We've followed this format since then, and it's working out really well.

Kari Baumann, Manager
Weld Library District
Greeley, CO

We take the names and phone numbers of 10 people and 5 alternates. We then call the day before the class to remind them they had signed up. We have a few people cancel them, which is why we have alternate names. We have had quite a few just not show up lately, but I think that's because they registered too far in advanced and forgot about the class. I would definitely recommend not registering people more than a month in advance if you

can help it."

"We haven't figured out how to keep people from canceling. I've heard of taking a small deposit ($5) that is refunded when they attend, but we don't do that.

Courtney Stephens, Reference Librarian
Williamson County Public Library
Franklin, TN

We teach a five-session class that covers one topic per session: Intro to Computers (what is a mouse, terminology, etc); Mousercize; Intro to Basic Word Processing using Word Pad; Intro to the Internet; and just added this past year, Using Library Resources from Home. Patrons must attend all five classes, which run about 90 minutes.

We offer 2- 4 sessions per season, one class for adults, and one just for seniors. The classes follow the same format & use the same handouts, but we slow it down a bit for the seniors. I've been here about a year and a half, and it's mostly seniors that sign up for either class - I think I've only had 4 or 5 people who weren't officially seniors.

Penny Ramirez
Reference Librarian
Crystal Lake Public Library
Crystal Lake, IL

"We had a lot of trouble with patrons not showing up. We came up with 3 methods to manage this:
1. We call everyone the night before. This actually doesn't take long at all.
2. If you register in person, we hand out cards with the date/time/class like a doctor's office appointment card.

We have room for 10 in our lab. We register 8 and write down 4-5 alternates who usually end up in the class. After we call around the night before and get cancellations, we call the alternates and get them in.

Katie Crouse, Director of Adult Services
Fayetteville Free Library Fayetteville, NY

"Yes, we have had no shows and drop outs. My audience is senior citizens. Some get frustrated and quit, others have had to quit to take care of grandchildren, and others have gone on extended vacation south."…. They haven't been able to do too much as their situations vary.

Mary Lukkarila
Library Director And Computer Instructor
Cloquet Public Library – Cloquett, MN

"We did but we pushed sign-up closer to the actual date the classes start. Now we have a running waiting list and simply call a couple weeks beforehand to make sure they are still interested."

Gregory McClay
Systems Librarian

"This happens sometimes, but we also allow for walk-ins, so we even out pretty much. Our classes are 2.50 each (which I think discourages signing up and not showing up). We don't register until students pay and the fee is non-refundable."

Mrs. C. Michele Haytko
Norristown Public Library
Norristown, PA

Do you teach in a "Learning Lab"?

Responses:

Yes. We have a capacity of 10 people per class. *E. Carolyn White*

… at Main we have a very small lab. *Pamm Clements*

We do have a dedicated lab at most of our branches. Sometimes the lab is 'open' for people to drop by and ask individual questions. *Jill Corrente*

We have a computer lab at two locations. The one at Farr [Branch] has room for 6 plus instructor, the one at Lincoln Park seats 8 plus instructor. Both are equipped with a projector and screen so that the instructor can demonstrate things while each attendee can be hands-on. *Kari Baumann*

We have a 24 computer lab that is equipped with a projector, screen, and instructor's laptop. We teach all of our classes in there because we can close the door and avoid disturbing anyone or being interrupted. *Courtney Stephens*

We teach in our computer lab and reserve 5 computers for continued regular patron use and free up the other 10 for teaching."

We announce before class we'll be teaching. I thought patrons would find it disruptive but they just keep on working and occasionally stop to listen. One of our computers is connected to an overhead projector so everyone is seeing the same thing at the same time. It is a great set up.
Katie Crouse

Since I have laptops, I create a temporary lab in our meeting room for each class and then put away the laptops to recharge in between. *Mary Lukkarila*

In a meeting room with laptops. *Greg McClay*
We have an Electronic Resources Lab (aka The Computer Lab) and we shut it down for public access when we teach. We have 16 machines. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*
Yes *Cynthia Kiyotake*

How do you schedule classes, that is, at what time of the day – mornings (before you open), afternoon, or/and evenings?

Responses:

We teach all times of the day and evening. We had previously set most classes for mornings, but that was too limiting, especially for people with jobs.

Part of our evaluation sheet asks participants what time works best for them. The number of people who wanted evenings and afternoons surprised us. We are now scheduling most of the classes in the late afternoon, e.g., 4 to 5:30 p.m. or 6 to 6:30 p.m., and it seems to be working well. We found that evenings are difficult, especially in the winter month. "Most folks just don't want to go out again once they're home after work. *E. Carolyn White*

Patrons have continued to request evenings and weekends. We do offer many Saturday classes, but resources (open lab on Sundays and lots of evenings) mean we are restricted in what we can offer.

Although there is a demand for weekend classes, they are unable to teach - since they work on the reference desk. *Pamm Clements*

It really depends on when the teacher is available and what your demographics are. Elderly communities like mornings/afternoons; young communities like evenings and weekends. *Jill Corrente*

Since July, we have a regular schedule for our classes: Tuesdays 10 to 11:30 a.m. at Lincoln Park; Wednesdays 6 to 7:30 p.m. in Spanish at Lincoln Park; and Thursdays 3:30 to 5 p.m. at Farr Branch. We are open at the hours that we teach these classes. We teach the same content all week for all three classes. Week one is Computer Basics, week two is Windows Basics, week four Word Basics. We recently decided to split the computer basics into two classes with Windows Basics being the second part. We had taught a class on using the library from home, but we were not getting good attendance for it, so we are dropping it. We will provide that kind of class as patrons demand it, rather than as drop-ins. *Kari Baumann*

Right now our classes are scheduled on Tuesday mornings at 10 a.m. They last 1.5 to 2 hours. We have had evening classes in the past that were from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. (we close at 8 p.m.). We have also scheduled classes on Thursday afternoons from 2to 4 p.m. *Courtney Stephens*

We teach on Wednesday mornings at 10 a.m. We cane to this time by looking at stats and found this was our least busy time in the lab. We also have max staff in the library on Wednesday and not story time (or other programs) so we don't overflow the parking lot.

We have discussed evening classes but at this point we are targeting patrons that really need basic training (how to use the mouse, word processing, internet searching, email, file management). Patrons that come at night need more in depth classes that we are not teaching at this point (excel, publisher, etc.).

We surveyed patrons for a month before we started any planning just to find what the needs were. Overwhelmingly the need was for basics. We may not venture any further than basics, the philosophy being we are here to provide access and bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

You will also find that what you teach becomes what you are responsible for in future transactions with patrons and resource-wise we are not in position to provide follow up help for Access or Excel. By contrast we do follow up help with internet searching and email. *Katie Crouse*

I am still trying to figure out the best schedule. The afternoons seem to work best but I haven't tried evenings yet. *Mary Lukkarila*

Mondays 6:30 p.m. / Tuesdays 2:30 p.m. / Thursday 10:30 a.m. – It's a five week session we offer twice in the fall and twice in the Spring. *Greg McClay*

We offer classes on selected M-F. Each class (with minor exception) has either a day (11am-12: 30pm) or evening (7pm - 8: 30pm). Each session is independent, which is great, so that students can come and do one class and be done or they can come and take all of them. We do have 2 pre-reqs: Comp Basics 1 & Comp Basics 2. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*

Our classes are held from 10 – 12; 2 - 4 or 6:30 – 8:30 in the evenings on various days (except Fridays when we're half staffed). *Cynthia Kiyotake*

How do you manage registration?

Responses:

"I print brochures for fall, winter, and spring classes. (Summer classes are too likely to be skipped by patrons with new last minute plans so I no longer offer them during the summer.) The participants sign up at the Reference desk. I contact them to confirm as stated above. (Please view the comment in the "Do you have trouble with patrons signing up for classes and not attending . . .). " *E. Carolyn White*

I manage the registration with ppl calling my number or emailing me. *Pamm Clements*

We register at the reference desk by phone or in person and sometimes email if it comes in

that way). *Jill Corrente*

When we had registration, we had a sign-up sheet in an Excel document on the computer. Staff in our copy center (near the reference area) registered people for the class, taking up to three names on the waiting list once a class filled. They called registrants the day before or day of class to remind them. *Kari Baumann*

Registration is handled by the reference desk. Phone or in person registrations are accepted, but no voicemail or email. We usually have a really big rush on the first day, but then it dies down some. Registration closes 24 hours before the class begins. We take 10 names and 5 alternate names. *Courtney Stephens*

Registration is done manually by taking patron name and phone number at the Information Desk and logging them onto sheets for each day/time of class. We teach 3 classes a month. Next year we hope to have an automated product to allow us to register patrons online. *Katie Crouse*

There is one contact (me). *Mary Lukkarila*

We require people to come in person to register, and get a ticket. When we offer 4 sessions, we restrict 2 to cardholders only, then open it up after a certain date to anyone interested. Registration is only available after the newsletter comes out, and it's usually two-three weeks before the class starts - no advance registration for the next time. Tickets are distributed at the Reference Desk only, and we take the person's name, phone number, and library card number. We give a reminder call several days before the first session, and go to the waiting list if need be. We don't put more than 3 people on the waiting list. We've found that making them physically come and get a ticket cuts down on no-shows, although over the summer we had a few. I learned the hard way by taking a couple of reservations over the phone, and of course those folks didn't show, even after a reminder call.
Penny Ramirez

I mentioned a waiting list before. We had trouble with some patrons who just kept signing up again and again. The waiting list made sure new people can get in.
Greg McClay

We have a DB that we created specifically for class registrations. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*

Patrons come to the ref desk where the notebook signup is or call. *Cynthia Kiyotake*

How do you promote your classes?
Responses:
I post signs for the groups of classes in the library. I also send out PSAs to the local newspaper and radio stations. If I have classes that are not full, I may repeat a PSA and post a flyer specific to that class. *E. Carolyn White*
We promote the classes in various ways - we have a Programming Committee and the head of that has a list of local papers, radio, TV stations, and groups etc that she sends monthly calendars to. We also have a monthly calendar of events both online and printed. We print flyers for both our library branches; we are mentioned in the City Calendar. We also have a schedule for different programs to be promoted in the local paper through "focus" articles in the Lifestyle section. Word of mouth also has worked well - at the end of each class we ask patrons to complete an evaluation (short) and include a checklist asking them where they heard of our classes so we can evaluate our promotion. *Pamm Clements*
Flyers, Websites, posters, inform the Chamber, etc. *Jill Corrente*
Our classes are listed in our newsletter, which used to be quarterly but now will be bi monthly. Classes fill up within a week of the newsletter coming out. We get a lot of repeaters - they want to take it again to practice, even though we encourage them to come and use our public access computers for that. There seems to be a lot of word of mouth. We also recommend classes to patrons who are struggling with the public access computers. *Penny Ramirez*
We advertise in some of the local papers, such as the Senior Voice and Senior Marketplace as well as the Greeley Tribune. We create fliers in-house, and keep the schedule updated on the web site. (We're a little behind this month, but go to http://www.weld.lib.co.us/computerclass.html to see the schedule.) *Kari Baumann*
We have a column in the local paper that mentions our classes. They are also promoted inside the library with brochures that have all the details (times, classes, registration info). *Courtney Stephens*
Originally we promoted in our major paper (Post Standard) and also in our regional paper (Eagle Bulletin) and we were swamped with registrations. We tried keeping waiting lists and calling people month to month but we became receptionists very quickly and finally asked that people call next month to sign up. We pulled back our advertising and simply promote in our brochure and on the website and we are still inundated. This will be the one program you won't worry about low attendance. *Katie Crouse*
Right now in community education newsletters. *Mary Lukkarila*
People are always asking if we offer some kind of class. We've run it in the paper before

when we started and there's a page about it on our website. *Greg McClay*

Website, BB postings, and postings in the library and Lab**.** *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*

In our monthly newsletter and through flyers in the library. *Cynthia Kiyotake*

Do you team teach or use volunteers to assist in your public computer classes?

Responses:

It depends on the topic. Most times I teach the classes myself. When appropriate, I ask other librarians and our IS computer tech to assist (team teach). On limited occasions we have used a volunteer. *E. Carolyn White*

We have used volunteers – both volunteers that have computer skills and also MLS students doing their practicum with us. It works well as we can provide extra assistance during class. *Pamm Clements*

I, personally, like to have someone "float/drive" while I conduct the class. You always have someone that is really low level and needs lots of hand holding. A volunteer can help in this situation. *Jill Corrente*

At the moment we are not using volunteers to teach classes. It has been discussed, but right now reference staff teaches the classes. One person teaches each class. Each class has a PowerPoint presentation that is provided for the teacher and students so that no matter who teaches it is still the same basic information.
Courtney Stephens

We have 3 professional staff members who teach (2 librarians and our System Administrator), we don't use volunteers. We team teach in pairs. We find this adds a relaxed atmosphere where we play off each other and the patrons. Also none of us knows everything and it is nice to have 2 skills sets in the room at one time. One of us 'drives' the computer while the other does the actual teaching. Lastly, you'll want 2 staff in the room to keep people on the same screen. People fall behind very quickly and once they are frustrated they are lost to absorbing information. During our introduction we stress that this class is not a race and that we want to go at your speed. This really engages people.
Kati Crouse

Volunteers assist with classes. One volunteer has taught on a one-on-one basis. Most are taught by me. *Mary Lukkarila*

Three staff members do it, each person taking a separate time slot. *Greg McClay*

My boss and I teach, as do 2 of our Ref librarians (for 2 classes). We teach independently, except my boss and I do a team Excel class. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*

No team teaching; yes we use volunteers to assist! One effort we just started is an open lab where we partner technically challenged patrons with knowledge.
Cynthia Kiyotake

We teach individually, and there used to be two of us, but I'm on my own this season. We schedule a morning session and an afternoon session, always during regular library hours. Apparently they tried evenings before I started working here and had poor attendance. My dept head insists on a minimum of 4 registrants to hold the class, and we have cancelled a few sessions for low registrants.
Penny Ramirez

Do you provide separate classes for seniors?

Responses:

Yes, people choose if they want to take a Sr. class – they move at a slower pace. *Cynthia Kiyotake*

Not necessarily, unless the class is specifically geared to senior resources. Many of our participants do turn out to be seniors, especially in the basic computer classes. **E. Carolyn White**

The senior Center here in town does offer 4-day classes for a fee… seniors – children have a separate class twice-yearly. *Pamm Clements*

Sometimes if the community warrants it. *Jill Corrente*

We do have separate classes for seniors, but seniors are the main people who take our classes. The time of day that the classes are offered probably contributes to the audience. *Kari Baumann*

We don't have separate classes for seniors, but it is mostly seniors who register for our classes (especially during the day). *Courtney Stephens*

We don't provide separate classes for seniors, but it does seem that's the demographic that attends. Once we hosted a class especially for our local retirement home and that went well. We haven't had trouble with different ages mixing. On occasion we get a know-it-all patron who tries to dominate and show off knowledge. That has to be handled delicately because other immediately feel stupid but you'll look bad if you react. We just try to stay

on task and answer all questions as simple as possible. *Katie Crouse*
I only have classes for seniors. *Mary Lukkarila*
No. We have some middle-age students but most are in their 50's and 60's, a couple older. *Greg McClay*
No. Our classes are open for everyone. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*
I taught a session of web-based email last spring – one 2-hour class that was basically setting up and managing a yahoo mail account. I think we got 5 for that one, and the levels of skill were all over the place. *Penny Ramirez*

Another issue we are considering is using laptops to teach patrons public computer classes; however, we are concerned with the issues below:

If any of you have used laptops to teach patrons, we are interested in how it is working for you and whether the patrons are young or elderly?

Responses:

We have allowed a laptop once to a full class, and the use by an experienced patron. We try and avoid this because, as you mention, it would invite too many question about the differences. *Pamm Clements*
Sometimes I think elderly do better on laptops, because of the mouse pad on the laptop. *Jill Corrente*
We do not use laptops to teach our classes, but we're interested in doing that in the future. We are in the early stages of planning some new facilities, and this is definitely an option we're exploring. *Kari Baumann*
We have laptops set up, but we use full-sized keyboards and mice since it's much easier to learn using them. We do offer a large trackball for those who can't use the regular mouse, although one lady I had this summer actually had an easier time with the touchpad on the laptop. *Penny Ramirez*
We don't use laptops to teach our classes. We have desktops set up in our lab and use those instead. *Courtney Stephens*
There was a great article in Public Libraries this summer (June or July) about teaching computer classes and the authors stated they originally taught on laptops but that the keyboard and touchpad were entirely too difficult for patrons to navigate especially seniors with arthritis. Also seniors had a very difficult time seeing the small monitors as well. *Katie Crouse*

The laptops are working well. The senior citizens are also seeking information on what kind of computer to purchase and this gives them a chance to see if a laptop is a good choice. *Mary Lukkarila*

Works fine. They are kept in their cases and I think there is a certain therapeutic side to the patron taking out the laptop, hooking up the power cords, the mouse, and turning it on. *Greg McClay*

No laptops, sorry. *Mrs. C. Michele Haytko*

Because laptops have a different keyboard than desktops, which is usually what the novice uses, are the patrons able to still learn the keyboard and apply it to their home computer?

Responses:

Most do not have a computer at home. Those that do seem to be able to make the transition. I spend a little time identifying the differences between the two and let them find certain keys. *Mary Lukkarila*

Hasn't been a problem. *Greg McClay*

Hmmmm—it's been a while since we used laptops. I don't remember ever having complaints about differences (patrons are so grateful to have classes). Everyone's computer is a little different anyway – I don't think that's an issue. *Jill Corrente*

How and where do you store the laptop computers?
Do you think setting up laptops is time consuming?

Responses:

Before we got our dedicated lab (former quiet study room), the laptops were stored in a locked cabinet and had to be set up in our large meeting room for each class session We also rented a projector at that time (now we have one in the lab), so the classes were much more condensed to save on rental fees. I wasn't here, but I've heard that it was a HUGE hassle to set up and tear down the laptops before and after each class. *Penny Ramirez*

We purchased a locked charging cart and that is where they are stored and recharged at the same time. Setting up the computers is not time consuming. I also purchased a mouse for each laptop. Students must connect the mouse and start up their own computers each time. At the end of class they must shut down and unplug the mouse. *Mary Lukkarila*

At the time we used laptops, it was a mobile lab that went from branch to branch. They were packed up and moved as soon as one branch was done teaching classes. There wasn't much storing. We keep our instructor's laptops stored in an AV cart sometimes. Jill added

that she did believe setting up laptops is time consuming. In fact, her answer to the question was "Yes!" *Jill Corrente*
We store them in a cabinet in the admin office under lock and key. *Greg McClay*
Can the elderly learn on a laptop? **Especially those who have arthritic hands, etc.**
Responses:
Arthritis hasn't been a factor yet. Someone mentioned the touchpads before but you don't have to use the touchpad. You can get a secondary mouse to plug in the USB port. *Greg McClay*
Yes! *Jill Corrente*
Yes, they seem to learn well with the laptop. The touchpad is especially handy for those with arthritic hands. My own parents purchased a laptop (aged 75 and older) and like it better than their desktop. *Mary Lukkarila*