

**FJC Courtroom Use Study
Final Report Technical Appendices**

Technical Appendix Six

The Training Process

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Courtroom Use Study

The Training Process

We relied on staff in the courts to record the data we needed for the study. Doing so required a considerable training effort before data collection began, as well as on-going support during the data collection period. By the time we completed training in each of the twenty-six study districts, we had instructed over 1000 court staff on how to identify the data needed by the study and how to record it in DISCUS, the data recording software developed for the study (see Technical Appendix 5 for an overview of DISCUS). In this appendix we describe the training process. For materials provided to the data recorders, go to <http://cwn.fjc.dcn/dir/CUS/training.html> and select [Click here for complete training materials \(pdf\)](#).

Selection of Data Recorders

We surveyed the study courts early in the project to obtain information on, among other things, the identification of persons who would be recording the scheduling and actual occurrence of events (see Technical Appendix 2 for a copy of the survey). The courts consistently identified the judges' courtroom deputies (CRDs) as individuals who would have data recording responsibility. Because CRDs are in the courtroom with the judge and typically manage the judge's case calendar, they appeared to the courts, as well as to us, to be the logical data recorders.

When we began training in the courts and learned more about who manages a judge's schedule, we realized that we had underestimated the role that judicial assistants often perform in scheduling events, especially events that occur in chambers. Consequently, for the later-trained courts in Wave 1, and for all courts in Wave 2, we requested that judicial assistants attend the training sessions.

Courts sometimes sent selected law clerks and IT staff to the training sessions. Many of the individuals who worked with us to manage the project locally, i.e., the district courts' liaisons to the project, took the training as well to familiarize themselves with the software.

Preparation of Training Materials

DISCUS, the software used for data recording, was the core tool for achieving consistent data recording, but hands-on training of court staff was essential to ensuring that staff used the software correctly and consistently. To teach court staff how to record the study data—and how to identify what to record in the first place—we prepared a comprehensive manual for use in face-to-face training and for later reference by the data recorders.

We also sent the courts a number of advisories about particular recording questions as these arose.

Our plans for how best to conduct the training were guided by feedback from members of a Technical Advisory Group that met with us early in the summer of 2006. Since most of the group's members had experience with IT training of court staff, they had valuable insights into effective training methods and the substantive content we should cover. Chief among them were recommendations that the training be done face-to-face, that training in any given study district be carried out by a professional court staff trainer from outside the district, and that staff make actual use of DISCUS during the training session.

We turned to the Center's Education Division for expertise in developing the training program. We tested our first draft of training materials and our initial version of DISCUS in two pre-test districts in September 2006. The pre-test led to extensive revision of DISCUS and, consequently, to equally extensive revisions of the training materials. The materials we developed after the pre-test were used for training in the Wave 1 districts in late 2006. Based on that round of training, we made subsequent additional revisions, almost exclusively in packaging, rather than content, and used the new materials in the Wave 2 districts.

Content of the Training Materials, Reference Documents, and Recording Advisories

From the outset and through all revisions of the training materials, our goal remained the same—to provide specific instruction on what data to record, and how to record it, in DISCUS. Consistent with this goal, the materials served two functions: first, as the instruction manual that data recorders could use during the face-to-face, hands-on training session that most attended and, second, as a reference manual that could be reviewed as needed during the later data collection phase of the study. Wave 1 training materials were distributed as a fast-back document. Wave 2 materials were compiled in a binder, with tabs clearly delineating resources for use during training and resources available for later reference.

The core document, the Training Session Materials, walked the data recorders through the recording of several typical, and increasingly complex, court events. These included such tasks as scheduling a motions hearing, scheduling events involving multiple cases or taking place in several rooms, and scheduling a trial. The instruction then moved on to recording the actual occurrence of these events. An essential feature of the training document—and the training sessions—was to teach staff how to identify the events that should, and should not, be recorded. To facilitate learning, the training document provided pictures of screens that recorders would encounter as they correctly entered a scheduling or actual use event. Training introduced the recorders to each of the essential features built into DISCUS, including an extensive Help feature.

Supplemental information included: 1) a summary of key points about data recording (titled *Thirteen Critical Points*), 2) a written overview of the study, 3) a detailed description of DISCUS, 4) additional scenarios for practicing with the software, 5) a glossary of key terms, and 6) a list of persons to contact at the Center for additional help. We prepared and distributed a detailed document to help the recorders of Wave 2 correctly record a wide range of events that had been encountered in the Wave 1 districts (*What Do I Do When...?*).¹

As additional features were added to DISCUS to facilitate data recording, we issued updates on the software. For example, shortly after the Wave 1 recording period began, we recognized the need to add a feature that would make it easier for court staff to create records for events, such as trials, that are scheduled to last several days. After making the software revision, we sent guidance to all the Wave 1 districts on how to use the new feature. For the Wave 2 districts, we incorporated this information into the training materials.

Recruitment and Preparation of the Professional Trainers

On the advice of our Technical Advisory Group, we recruited six experienced trainers from the district courts to deliver the DISCUS training. To identify them, we asked FJC education specialists to nominate exceptionally skilled trainers with whom they had worked in the past. Within their own districts, these trainers, or court education specialists, are responsible for keeping judges and court staff up to date on IT and other innovations in the federal court system. They also train judges and staff in other districts, as not every district has its own education specialist.

In the fall of 2006, we held two training sessions for the education specialists to introduce them to the software application and to plan the training sessions. Their general experiences as educators and their specific experience with the software helped us further refine our training plans. We held an initial conference call to debrief the trainers (and ourselves) after the first week of training in Wave 1, a second call after the second week, and a final call when the training for Wave 1 ended. One purpose of these sessions was to make sure the trainers were covering the same training concepts in each district. Their feedback and experience in Wave 1 also helped us reorganize and simplify the presentation of materials and instruction in Wave 2. No debriefing calls took place during Wave 2, since the curriculum and training techniques were well established by then.

¹ During Wave 1, we usually learned of these events through telephone calls or email messages from the data recorders or the district liaisons. We provided recording instructions to the person who contacted us and, when we thought the question might apply in other districts, we sent an advisory to all the courts.

The Center is very grateful to the education specialists for lending their expertise to the study, and we are grateful to their districts for allowing them to serve.

Reuben Amaro	Western District of Texas
Diana Diaz	Western District of Missouri
Lois McLeod	District of South Carolina
Luta Pleiss	District of Nebraska
Paula Rogers	Northern District of Illinois
Dee Taylor	Southern District of Mississippi

The Training Process

We conducted the training for the thirteen Wave 1 districts in November and December 2006 and for the thirteen Wave 2 districts in February and March 2007. The timing was designed to be close enough to the actual data collection period that skills would be retained, but far enough in advance that the data recorders could have all scheduling data entered into DISCUS one month in advance of the actual data collection period.

We sent a team of three persons to each district—the professional trainer, the Center staff member who served as liaison for the district, and a Center support staff person. We began our visit by having our Center liaison to the district meet with the judges and court staff to provide an orientation to the study and to answer questions. The liaison discussed why and how the study was being done, and emphasized the importance of accurate data collection, describing the concerns we had heard that court staff might be unreliable data recorders. We urged staff to avoid both under- and over-reporting on the use of the courtrooms, and described how recorded information would be verified. For the handout we distributed at the orientation meeting, go to <http://cwn.fjc.dcn/dir/CUS/whyconducted.html> and select [Click here for a complete study overview \(pdf\)](#).

After the Center’s liaison met with judges and court staff, the trainers provided hands-on training for CRDs and judicial assistants on the use of DISCUS. The trainers drew on everyday scenarios to take staff through the types of events that are typically scheduled and held in the courtroom. We conducted the training in each district’s training room so that every data recorder would be able to work at a computer while the instruction was delivered. We taught the data recorders how to use the basic features of DISCUS, but since the program itself is quite easy to use, the emphasis in training was on the decisions staff would have to make when recording data.

Because we expected court staff to ask questions about nonroutine events, the Center liaison attended each training session. When a trainer was uncertain of the answer to a question about DISCUS, the trainer turned to the liaison for a response. We collected and

regularly reviewed such questions so liaisons could provide consistent information across districts. We compiled these questions and answers into a document that Wave 2 data recorders could consult as reference material. For a copy, go to <http://cwn.fjc.dcn/dir/-CUS/what.html> and select [Click here for a complete “What Do I Do When...?” document \(pdf\)](#).

Training featured follow-along and do-it-yourself (or do-with-a-partner) exercises that the trainer reviewed before moving to the next concept. Sessions lasted from two to two-and-a-half hours. Trainers normally worked with groups of ten or fewer trainees, which minimized disruption of court operations, generally matched the size of training facilities, and served the pedagogical interests of those learning DISCUS.

In the smaller districts, we trained a total of perhaps a dozen staff members to record data, but in our largest districts we trained over 100 individuals by conducting multiple sessions. Our concerns about quality control across such a large number of data recorders were balanced by two considerations. First, we built into the application both constraints and prompts to ensure data accuracy. Second, the job responsibilities of judicial staff require them to handle complex matters on a routine basis and equip them with the knowledge base for matching court events to the data collection fields in the application.

The training visits to the districts lasted anywhere from a day to a week, depending on the size of the district. We went to all of the districts’ main courthouses but also to nearly every divisional office where there were court staff in residence.² Altogether, we conducted training sessions in fifty-six locations in the study districts and three locations in the pre-test districts.

Subsequent Training and Support

Before data collection began, we offered additional training to court staff. We did so mainly through web conferencing, a distance learning technology that combines telephone conference capabilities with online Internet demonstration to simulate the face-to-face, hands-on experience of our original training sessions. Our web conferences took one of three forms: (1) refresher training for data recorders who had completed the standard on-site training, (2) question-and-answer sessions that were hosted by a project member having extensive knowledge of DISCUS (these were intended to be responsive to individual inquiries, and court staff were invited to attend all or part of such sessions), and (3) core instruction for data recorders who were unable to attend an on-site session. The latter included a small number of staff that had been on vacation or sick leave when we conducted training in their districts.

² In several instances, however, staff in outlying divisions participated in the training by videoconference or by traveling to the main courthouse.

Once data collection began, we offered continuing support to data recorders. In two districts with particularly challenging caseloads, we placed Center staff on-site during the first week of data collection to provide assistance as needed. Two of the project trainers—both of whom worked in districts selected as study courts—offered supplemental training and support to data recorders in their own districts. We staffed a round-the-clock telephone Help line to respond to questions. Last, but not least, our liaisons kept in close touch with their assigned districts to help any data recorder who had questions or unusual situations to record.