

Keys to Successful Project Management - a Faculty Workshop
April 22, 2008

SUMMARY OF PRESENTERS' COMMENTS

This lunchtime workshop featured presentations and comments by **Candace Oviatt**, Professor of Oceanography, **Art Gold**, Professor of Natural Resources Science, and **Faye Boudreaux-Bartels**, Professor and Chair of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering. Following short discussions among participants at individual tables about why they were attending and what they found challenging about project management, the presenters offered comments. The remainder of the workshop included an interactive question and answer period with the participants.

Candace Oviatt opened the presentation by reviewing 3 key pieces of advice for working with others in the lab or on projects:

1. Don't collect bad data!
2. Follow the rules of the systems you are working within. You will get things done much more efficiently if you cooperate with the rules that exist, whether you like them or not.
3. Treat EVERYONE with respect.

Art Gold then reviewed some of his strategies, and Candace and Faye Boudreaux-Bartels supplemented his comments. In sum, they suggested the following:

1. Ownership, pride, and a sense of accomplishment must be present in those involved in a project. An effort to promote these characteristics in students and colleagues is key to project success. Art always has an "intake talk" with his graduate students, that usually carries over into several conversations across the semester. He emphasizes in these talks that everyone makes mistakes, and to not be afraid to talk about this. Students must feel confident to communicate openly. Faye believes it is important to give students permission to challenge her. International students, in particular because of their cultural norms about respect and authority, may need encouragement in this arena. She at times will make mistakes purposefully and encourage students to point them out to her. Others agreed, emphasizing that students should be made aware not only of their professors successes but their failures, as well.
2. Another key to successful project management is early preparation of the budget during the proposal writing. Waiting until the last days is stressful and unfair to those who are helping. Relationships with others on campus must be nurtured, and it is crucial to be respectful of staff time when planning the budget. Also, it is much easier to manage a budget when it is allocated in big "chunks." If the budget becomes too segmented (too many account codes), tracking becomes very labor intensive.
3. Art noted that 30% of a project manager's time is typically spent on actually managing the project. People don't often realize this, resulting in ineffective management and frustration. Thus, building this administration time into the project plan is important.

4. Develop personal relationships with the people in the offices where you need to do business: Research, Grant Accounting, Budget, Controller, Human Resources. People are more likely to help you, when you need help, if they know you. Expect to wait your turn when you ask for help.
5. Regular staff meetings are also important. A project manager must keep the lines of communication open. Students will often not ask about things they're not sure of, and it is important to not only find out what students' know, but what they don't know. Candace has her students start before classes begin, to become familiar with the lab and procedures, etc. A good idea is to create a "lab manual" that students add to each semester, with tips, advice, etc.
6. What to do with students who aren't working out? This is a difficult situation but Candace feels it is important to let them go. "You can't motivate students." They need to be motivated before you hire them. Under-performing students are not helped by allowing them to remain employed - they need to "feel the hurt." Sometimes it may be effective to gradually decrease their hours to see if their work improves. Art often types up a "to do" list for students that is referred to each meeting. Although sometimes feeling "heavy handed," it is effective and helps not only the students, but Art, to stay on track.
7. In working on collaborative projects, the most important feature is to be compatible with your colleagues. Finding someone who you like and who is excited about the same things you are is key, and more important than finding someone with stellar credentials. Personalities must "click" or the project will not be fun and possibly not effective.