

Faculty Bag Lunch Session

Thursday, February 6, 2020

12:10 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

203 Mrak Hall

Topic: You're the Boss: Managing Your Team



Presenters:

Jared Shaw – Chair and Professor of Chemistry, College of Letters and Science

Cecilia Colombi – Professor of Spanish & Portuguese, College of Letters and Science

Tracey Pereida – Academic Personnel Analyst, Graduate Studies

General Advice

Do not invent management strategies; Do not simply manage your group the way your previous advisors managed theirs...model yourself after someone who is successful. After a few years of settling in, consider participating in the Faculty Leadership Academy.

Maintain a portfolio of 3 or more advisors who will recommend ways to handle managing a group. If 2/3 tell you the opposite of what you think, go with their recommendation.

Erase “When I was a grad student, I did X, and that is what I expect my students here to do” from your vocabulary.

Strive to be organized and hold your group to a similar standard. Adopt a task organization system such as Omnifocus; calendar + todo lists do not count.

Calendar is still important!! Get everything on there. Stay focused on devoting time where it matters. Learn to say “no” when appropriate.

Be punctual and encourage punctuality from your students. Do not be the colleague that everyone has to wait on for meetings, etc.

Recruiting Grad Students & Postdocs

What strategies have you found to be effective for recruiting great folks to your lab, especially if you're a relatively new (unknown) faculty member?

- Contact every admitted student and offer to meet with them, consider taking them each out for coffee or lunch.
- Your current group is your most influential recruiting tool.

Where should one advertise?

- I don't really advertise directly, but I make sure to maintain a current website, which is the #1 way students look for PIs. My field is tightly networked, and my subfields are well-represented on two linking sites: organiclinks.net; chembiolinks.net
- Give lots of seminars. See if your department will pay for recruiting seminars.

What do you look for in a CV?

- Research experience in the area needed for the project which should be bolstered by one or more rec letters; GPA (higher=generally more organized, able to meet deadlines, follow directions etc; co-authorship on a publication a bonus. <https://gradhub.ucdavis.edu>

Do you interview folks? What do you ask about?

- Yes, during the visitation (after admission) and again after they arrive. Also solicit feedback from current group members.
- Describe current project "at the board", answer a science question related to project

Recruiting Undergrads

Should one recruit undergrads ?

- Yes, if necessary. My department has 800 majors, >200 of whom are doing research, so they are constantly contacting me. Upper division classes are excellent for recruiting.

When are they useful and when not?

- Useful when paired effectively with a grad student or postdoc to work on an established project. Not (generally) useful to launch a new project.

How does undergrad mentoring help your dossier?

- Helps generally and also puts you in a good position to help your department get other grants (NSF-REU, Beckman, etc).

Additional Points

- Require them to apply for PUF grants
- If they are URM, work with the URC to get them into a URM-specific program (MURPPS, CAMP, etc).
- Require them to present (talk, not poster) at one or more conferences, including a local one.

Managing Expectations

After you recruit folks, what steps should one take to support them in being successful?

- Have a formal meeting to discuss expectations, monitor progress carefully, provide immediate feedback if expectations are not being met and praise if they are.
- “Praise publicly, criticize privately” ...good advice I got from a co-worker.

Do you have written agreements, mentoring plans, etc.?

- Yes. Got one from a very successful PI at another school and adapted to suit my needs.

Have you ever had things go really wrong in your lab? How do you handle that? What resources, if any, were helpful? Have you ever had to terminate someone? Why and how?

- Not really...I have had two grad students (out of >20) leave my group, and in each case I was on the brink of dismissing them. I have had to terminate an undergraduate and involvement of URC staff was very helpful.

Additional Points

- Maintain a formal and professional atmosphere; err on the side of “bossiness” rather than friendliness. Deliver on your promises (and threats) as needed. Remind your students (as needed) that failure to meet your agreed-upon expectations will have consequences.

General Advice

Working with TAs and AIs

Working in a group

- **Clear datelines** for the whole quarter schedule- Chronogram
- **Delineate responsibilities** from the very beginning of the job.
- Check up the schedule at the beginning, midterm and end of the quarter.
- Mentoring- working collaborative- get to know the people.
- Always use and connect with the resources already on campus.
 - **Dean's Office: resources and Labor contracts**
 - **CAPS: general well-being**
 - **Judicial Affairs**

You are not alone!!!

Connect, connect, connect ... with your peers, friends, colleagues, students and other offices that can support and help you to figure a difficult situation out.

SCENARIOS

Scenario #1: The New TA

You have a new teaching assistant this quarter who has never been a TA before. A few weeks into the quarter, he is unresponsive to emails, late to grade assignments, and has cancelled discussion sections at the last minute. When you catch up with him after lecture, he states that he has already worked 20 hours this week. What steps should you take? You know his major professor well; do you talk with her about the problems that have emerged?

Scenario #2: The Perplexed Postdoc

A postdoc comes to you indicating he is overwhelmed trying to manage the lab and mentor graduate students. He is unsure how much he should be meeting with graduate students and helping them through every step of the research process. He feels frustrated by how much guidance the graduate students require and expresses how he never needed this much help when he was a graduate student. You have heard that he sometimes loses his temper and shouts at students when they make mistakes. How do you advise the postdoc? How do you address the issues in the research group as a whole?

Scenario #3: Safety First

You have hired a graduate student researcher to work this summer on a project that will require travel and research in the field. She discloses to you that she is pregnant and will be in her third trimester this summer, but still plans on working. You have concerns for her health and safety due to the working conditions. How do support this student?

Scenario #4: You're the Boss/Mentor

You have hired your own graduate student as a GSR and she is not meeting expectations conducting research in the lab. She has not made sufficient progress on running experiments or collecting data. She does not update lab notes or always participate in lab meetings. In addition, she is registered for 299 units with you this quarter and has just turned in a rough draft of a dissertation chapter. How do you address the fact that she is not meeting expectations in the lab?

Scenario #5: “Professor, I’m Offended.”

An undergraduate student in one of your courses reports to you that one of your teaching assistants has made some offensive remarks in a discussion session. The student doesn’t feel comfortable speaking to the teaching assistant about this directly. What do you do?

Scenario #6: Breaking Up is Hard to Do

Two of your TAs have been romantically involved for the past year. You hear from others that they just broke up, and one of them is bad-mouthing the other to the rest of the group. Camps are beginning to form with some TAs on one “side” and some TAs on the other “side”. Your group has been remarkably cohesive for a long time, and you are very concerned about minimizing damage to the group while still supporting both of your TAs. What do you say or do? Why?