Using a Project Manager to Improve Your Team

A project manager is someone who helps organize a team and keeps the team moving forward. Feedback indicates that faculty and students alike find this role to be extremely beneficial. Moreover, it provides a valuable professional development opportunity for master’s and graduate students or post-docs.

**BENEFITS OF USING A PROJECT MANAGER**
- Helps keep the team organized and on track
- Reduces the time burden on faculty
- Gives students a singular point of contact for questions and administrative matters
- Provides a valuable developmental opportunity for master’s and graduate students or post-docs

**“Having a graduate student or postdoc to interface directly with the undergrads is absolutely critical. It doesn't diminish the experience for undergrads, but rather enhances it, and honestly I could not have led the team without my grad student.”**

**COMMON TASKS OF A PROJECT MANAGER**
- Work with the team to set milestones and a timeline for the project
- Track progress towards milestones
- Identify problems in the team’s operations and filter those up accordingly
- Mentor undergraduate students (intended to complement, not replace faculty engagement)
- Capture important notes from meetings, such as next steps
- Schedule meetings
- Make arrangements for site visits and travel
- Correspond with external partners/clients
- Respond to requests for information from the themes and other campus administrators
- Manage the project budget
- Identify opportunities to share the team’s work
- Write blog entries about the team’s work
- Organize team building activities
- Help with grading and crediting
- Capture and share the outcomes from the project

**IDENTIFYING A PROJECT MANAGER**
Anyone can play the role of a project manager. Data from past years indicate that staff, faculty, master’s/graduate students and post-docs have all served in this role. That said, where possible, we encourage teams to recruit master’s/graduate students for this role. We have received positive feedback: from faculty that these students are up to the task; from undergraduates indicating that they learned a lot from them and valued the opportunity to get to know more advanced students; and from...
master’s and graduate students that this provides a valuable and enjoyable developmental opportunity. Ideas for recruiting a project manager include:

- Contact relevant DGSs and ask them to share information about your project with their students and/or ask for student recommendations – to find contact information for the DGSs, click here, and then navigate by department
- Advertise the project through listservs and student groups in the master’s programs and professional schools
- Encourage master’s and graduate students who have participated in Bass Connections to recommend the program to their friends
- Specifically note opportunities for master’s and graduate students in your project description on the Bass Connections website and other locations where you publicize it
- Consult with your theme leaders/administrators for suggestions

ENSURING DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PROJECT MANAGER

Putting a little time into making this a valuable experience for the project manager can go a long way:

- Meet with the project manager at the beginning of the project to set clear expectations and goals
- Ask what his/her developmental goals are
- Provide advice on mentoring students
- Identify opportunities for the project manager to present or write on the team’s work
- Provide regular feedback to the project manager
- Create opportunities for the project manager to lead parts of team meetings or client/external interactions

“As a graduate student, I got invaluable experience mentoring undergraduates and leading them as a team, especially over the summer. I also established new interdisciplinary collaborations that allowed me to learn new skills and new topic areas, and was important for my professional development.”