FOCUS

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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Advisers

Tracking Project Progress

When tackling all the myriad tasks involved in planning student activities, it's easy to sometimes overlook details. If you've ever found yourself In the midst of a major project—trying to keep track of who is doing what, when they are supposed to have it completed, how much it's all going to cost—and worrying that something will slip through the cracks, perhaps it's time to look at how you track the progress of your projects. A variety of methods are available for keeping details from being overlooked.

Task Assignment Sheets

When planning a project, student leaders should begin by imagining what the end result will be and brainstorming a list of all the tasks that need to be done to make it happen. The next step to make the project a reality is to determine who will do each of the tasks on the list and set a deadline by which they should be accomplished. Resist the temptation to put "ASAP" as the deadline; specific dates are harder to ignore.

One of the simplest methods of keeping track of these details is to list all the tasks, assignments, and deadlines on a standard form such as the Task Assignment Sheet (see sample). Committee chairs, officers, and the adviser can refer to the sheet to refresh their memory of any details.

Activity Duty Charts

For a more visual method of charting details, create a duty chart based on the brainstormed list of all the tasks that need to be completed. To do this, after each committee generates its list of tasks, student leaders assign due dates and "person responsible" names to each task. The chair or other designated leader creates a large chart with all the tasks listed in chronological order and hangs the chart in the activity room or adviser's room where all can see it.

As a task is completed, the student responsible for it initials the chart. Advisers, officers, and others can easily see the progress of a project by following what tasks have been signed off on. If a deadline has been missed, an officer or the adviser can follow up with the person responsible to address any problems before they become impossible to overcome.

The charts can be saved as reference material for the next year, or the items on them can be transcribed into the final committee report.

Gantt Charts

In a Gantt chart, dates run along the top of the chart and each task to be performed is written on a separate row with an additional column identifying who is responsible for its completion. Tasks can be grouped by committee or can be listed chronologically.

A horizontal bar represents the expected timeline for each task, with the left end marking the beginning of the task and the right end marking the expected date for completion. As the project progresses, the chart is updated by filling in the bars to a length proportional to the fraction of work that has been done.

Student leaders and the adviser

Project Task Assignment Sheet

Task to be completed	Who's doing it?	When to be completed?	Done?

can get a quick status report by drawing a vertical line through the chart at the current date. Completed tasks lie to the left of the line and are completely filled in. Current tasks cross the line and are behind schedule if their filled-in section is to the left of the line and ahead of schedule if the filled-in section stops to the right of the line. Future tasks lie completely to the right of the line.

To be effective, Gantt charts should be limited to 15–20 items so the chart fits on a single page. If the number of tasks is more than 20, break it into separate charts, perhaps listing each committee's work on a separate chart.

Visit *www.me.umn.edu/courses/me4054/assignments/gantt.html* for instructions on how to create a Gantt chart using Microsoft Excel.

Project Planning Tree

Similar in nature to a family tree, a Project Planning Tree starts with a central theme and branches out into sub-categories. The tree provides the main category and the branches show the details within that category.

To create the tree, students create a list of tasks to be completed and write each task on a sticky note.

Discuss how the tasks fit into categories. Logical planning categories to use are Who, What, and When. As a group, determine which tree format is best for the project you are planning—should it be a Who tree, a What tree, or a When tree? If the tree is the "who" then the branches will indicate the "what" and the "when." If the tree is the "what" then the branches need to indicate the "when" and the "who." (See sample.)

Organize the sticky notes on a large piece of chart paper and hang it in a place where it can be seen frequently. As tasks are completed, an X may be drawn across the appropriate sticky note. When the total project is finished, the tree may be used to help in evaluating the project; the contents of the sticky notes can be recorded in the committee report for future reference.

Developing a method of tracking the progress of a project and using it consistently will enable your group to rest assured that they won't be scrambling around at the last minute trying to make up for a task that was overlooked.

Sample Project Planning Tree

The Project: ______________________________ The Tree : _________________ Date Created: ___________

Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch
Juan	Rebecca	Paul	Ben	Mr. Lopez	Madelyn	Adam
Type and copy pledge sheets (4/1)	Contact 3 businesses for prizes (3/25)	Press release for news (3/25)	Contact 3 businesses for prizes (3/25)	Arrange for participants early release (3/20)	Design T-shirts (4/1)	Get tickets printed (4/3)
	Arrange for sign-up (4/4)		Order T-shirts (4/5)	Order cash box (4/5)		

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