

MENTORING SPARK

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► PROJECT PLANNING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Students entering a **graduate program** have a variety of knowledge and skills related to *project planning and management*. Students may have participated in a senior design team, but there was likely a novice level of planning (e.g., *success-driven schedule was the plan*) by the team. Thus, the variety of backgrounds often result in a gap between what can be planned and the actual execution of the plan.

For example, the plan may lack considerations for competing priorities (*coursework, research, personal commitments*), time delays, added data needed, difficulty in analyzing data, or having other resources (*people, equipment, receipt of materials, etc.*) available when needed.

Consequently, as students progress from completing assigned tasks to actually managing a complex project that relies on collaborators (and often conflicting resources), they can feel overwhelmed and “stuck” when the project is not progressing as planned/hoped. Setting an actionable goal can help students to keep moving forward and avoid feeling overwhelmed.

As a result, the **first Project Planning Spark is related to goal setting**.



LEVEL 1: GOAL SETTING

LEVEL 2: BEING PRAGMATIC

LEVEL 3: PROJECT MANAGEMENT



FACULTY FYI

This **Spark** is for students who are new to project planning (i.e., *not just being on a project team*). The three **Sparks** on project planning are intended to build students' skills, enabling them to successfully set up and execute complex projects. Project management involves managing multiple facets (budget, communication, risk, resources, etc.) that were developed during the project planning stage with the outcome of achieving the project's goals.

Project planning is included as part of our series to help students set themselves up **for success – as the old adage says, “**



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Discuss with students the different types of goals they may have during their graduate studies. This includes long-term and short-term goals (e.g., *getting their degree, finishing classes, finishing a literature review, authoring a paper, etc.*).
- Discuss with students that project planning is more than scheduling; it includes having goals and knowing what is needed to reach the goals and how to handle the interaction of goals.
- Ask students to state the reasons for their goals as they develop them. If some of the reasons are personal, do not force a response, but remind them it is important to self-reflect on their reasons.
- Help students understand that goal setting is a first step to developing an action tracker as part of one's project planning portfolio.

CONTINUED ...

A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code to access this and other *Mentoring Spark* tip sheets:





DIGGING DEEPER

There are many tools available to help with goal setting. Two are provided here.

- **“Hunks, Chunks, and Bites”** goal setting. To use this tool, students should first break down their long-term goal (*hunks*) into smaller projects (*chunks*) and then into daily/weekly activity-sized bites.
- **SMART** goal setting tool for chunks and bites. (See Exercise 2 below.)

S = SPECIFIC

M = MEASURABLE

A = ATTAINABLE

R = RELEVANT

T = TIME-BOUND

Please visit the RDI Mentoring Sparks website for examples and links to these tools and resources!



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Have students pick a **large project or goal** and break it into several chunks and each chunk into several bites. This work can be carried through the remaining project planning series.
2. Develop **SMART goals** from two of the bites. For each component, answer the following questions, as that will help develop the SMART goal technique:
 - **Specific:** What am I going to do? Why is it important to me?
 - **Measurable:** How will success be measured, how will I know I achieved the goal?
 - **Attainable:** What actions are needed to achieve the goal? What resources do I need?
 - **Relevant:** Is the goal worthwhile? How does it fit into my larger plans? How does it fit into my values?
 - **Timebound:** When will I complete the goal? Does it fit into my current schedule? Does it align with my other goals?



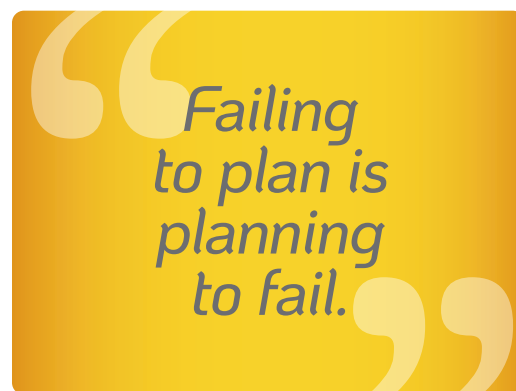
REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Student:** How does using a set process for goal setting compare to your previous methods?
- **Faculty:** Are there common opportunities for improvement related to how students think about their graduate time in terms of project planning and goal setting that you can explicitly talk about?



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Help students to evolve in their goal setting skills by asking “how” and “what if” questions to the students as they present their goals. This is not intended to be used as a negative, but to generate thoughtful consideration by the student, help them think about risks & risk mitigation, and help them be pragmatic in their goal setting.
- Review students’ progress toward goals often (perhaps monthly or even weekly) to help them stay on track. Trust, but verify their progress. Have the student practice the art of providing objective evidence that they are where they say they are with respect to their goals.
- Provide formal feedback on students’ progress towards goals twice a year, with one of the times held during their annual performance review.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a basic goal related to a joint project, such as a publication, conference paper, or individual project, such as a qualifying exam.



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