



Feb 7, 2011:

**First meeting to exchange ideas, questions, complaints, experiences and ideas about ways to make “the job” (in all its various forms) easier and more effective.**

Hello folks .... Here is a shorter summary of what we (well, I) learned from yesterday’s gathering:

The primary purpose of these meetings will be to exchange experiences and ideas about how to do “the job” better, in all its various forms. Sometimes, administrative questions or complaints will come up, and there might be help from peers. However, these meetings are sponsored by the EOS Science Education Initiative, not by “head office”, so we may not be able to help with some administrative questions, other than to refer the issue to someone in admin.

I think I heard several perspectives on how to make the most of monthly gatherings like this. Issues that need to be kept in mind include:

- The need for a balance between “workshop oriented” (guided) ... and ... more “free form” gatherings with very lightweight chairing.
- The need to balance the mandates of both the participants and the ‘sponsors’. For the record, I think it fair to say that EOS-SEI would like to (a) enable individual improvement opportunities for here and now, and (b) identify and implement long term, persistent improvements that will enhance the undergraduate education this Department delivers.
- The best setting (room, etc.) needs to be chosen for each gathering. Some may be in workshop mode, others in more of a “cocktail party” mode.

Others who participated might organize the many great comments and suggests that we heard differently, but from my perspective, I think three general areas of interest were introduced. Perhaps these could serve as starting points when choosing a focus for each of these meetings.

- Communications
  - Discuss ways of balancing department, instructor, TA and undergrad expectations
  - Logistics: some aspects include PRE-briefing, tracking, managing, and debriefing a TA job. An options-and-ideas exchange might be useful for this topic.
  - Benefits to TAs, instructors, and students of having a head TA in a course, or more broadly. Then, what would that head TA’s job look like?
- Developing specific skills. Any number of topics could go here, but some that came up yesterday include:
  - Providing feedback on written work
  - TA’ing online: grading, feedback, discussion boards
  - Lab tutoring: how to be an excellent lab tutor. (See also “providing feedback” above)
  - Exchange of experiences: what kinds of challenging one-on-one situations have people experienced? Then discuss ideas for handling them.
- More general aspects of professional development (similar to developing skills in some cases)
  - Discuss various experiences people have had with “formal” training – the pros and cons, etc.
  - Working as part of multiple-instructor and multi-TA teams
  - What the best tutors do, and up-scaling these strategies for labs or medium and large classes.
  - Workshops on any aspect of the eos516 course would help support folks who cannot attend the whole course.
  - Science education theory? For example, a science education reading club? We could discuss readings about learning science; this would speak to background about how people learn, and research-based best practices. Perhaps not what these lunch meetings should be, but some departments find such gatherings (over coffee, beer, whatever) to be interesting.
- Others – I may well have left something out – please feel free to add and correct.

I hope this summary is helpful, and I’m looking forward to future gatherings.



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