

## **GEO REU Workshop 2016**

### **Working group: Dealing with difficult situations**

3:00-4:00 pm - Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016

Leaders: David Karowe, Lina Patino, Lisa Rom

*This is from a small working group of workshop participants who discussed the topic and made notes on their discussion.*

Difficult situations are generally not the norm. However, NSF expects that we will sometimes have a difficult situation. While they are happy to let us try to deal with issues if possible significant problems can/should be discussed with the program officer.

#### **Problems identified:**

Identified problems included students and mentors that do not get along, students that do not put in required effort, family emergencies, poor fit projects for student interests, falsification of data, student medical emergencies, religious differences, etc.

#### **Recommendations:**

Mentors should stay flexible and ready to respond to unexpected things with support, compassion and ideas to cope. Some recommendations were as follows.

Poor student performance: Programs can divide stipends into two (or more) parts, with the last payment being linked to performance outcomes and satisfying requirements of the program. If it is unworkable it is ok to terminate and student from the program.

Poorly matched students to a research project: The group recommended that frequent communication throughout the early part of the program should be used to assess how students are fitting in. If student is not properly engaging, perhaps find a way to change the project topic to be a better intellectual fit.

Unsatisfied students: Sometimes students complete negative final program evaluations. Sometimes these come out of left field to the program coordinators. There was a strong recommendation for mid-program surveys and frequent meetings to identify issues early on such that they can be addressed.

Emergency situations: Mentors have to be the leaders and take control to provide the leadership in any given situation. Mentors need to know what resources are available to bring to bear. Some institutions may not fully support interns (especially non-academic REU programs). As a mentor, you are generally not alone. Know what these are and how to access them. If not at a research institute know what programs/resources you might have. Know what your resources are – maybe pick up optional \$80 fee for temporary health services for your program.

Gender equity issues: In one program there was an issue of gender identity. Most applications have an application question requesting student to specify Male or Female. Based on experiences of one program, it was suggested that applications add a category of, "I describe my gender differently".

Identifying problems: Utilize near-peer mentors to identify potential problems. Then students can be called in and ask open and inclusive questions that encourage direct communications of issues.

Programs may not be valued by higher administration: PIs should self-promote their program with administrators to ensure that there is awareness that their institution is participating in activities that directly address national priorities for undergraduate STEM education and build the national reputation of the institution.