

Experiencing Shared Leadership

By Jacqueline Pon

Within my committee, I have had some difficulties adjusting to the concept of “shared leadership.” I am used to having one leader organize and lead the rest of the group. So far, the shared leadership in my group has been working since we discuss the goals that we need to complete as a group with each of us coming up with suggestions on how to accomplish these goals. I feel comfortable with sharing my thoughts with my group members, but it sometimes feels like others are not interested in the topic at hand. One of the major issues was finding a good time to meet for all of the group members. Everyone has different schedules with differing amount of availability, so it was only practical that we discuss our extracurricular activities with the rest of the group. Once this was discussed, we were able to identify who would be able to take on more work if someone was too busy. As a member with more free time than some of the others, I do not mind taking on a little bit more responsibility if it helps with the overall progress of the group. Dividing up work is sometimes a problem when people only state, “Well, this is what I have...” or “It doesn’t matter to me if...” because they do not offer any solid solutions, and if an inference is made from their statements, it might be incorrect and cause problems for the group. I feel that I volunteer for positions within the group because I want to, but also just to get constructive dialog going. It is not that the people in my group are not hard workers; it just feels like it is hard to get some of them to commit themselves to a position within the group or a date for a meeting. But there are others in the group who are creative and bring lots of positive energy to the meetings.

As a member of the coordinating committee, it also has been a challenge to try not to “control” the activities of the other groups. Coming up with ideas on how to “lead” the other groups is challenging but also fun. I find that I sometimes fall back into my traditional ideas of leadership because there is a fine line between keeping the groups on track with their projects and ruling like a dictator. I have found that we tend to make a lot of “suggestions” for the others because we do not want to come off as being too forceful, but we also need to emphasize the importance of deadlines. The key one being the need

to know the amount of money needed from each group so that we can get them the money on time. My group has come up with several ideas on how the groups can keep themselves accountable of their work. We think that weekly updates from each group to a coordinator will keep the groups on track as well as creating their own deadlines on a community calendar that we will provide for them.

I am new to student activism as well as the concept of shared leadership and feel that the most important role of the more experienced students is to share their experiences with me. It would not be constructive for them to tell me exactly what to do and how to do it, but what they did and what the consequences of their actions were. By sharing experiences, the seasoned student activists can ensure that their same mistakes will not happen again because the new student activists will be able to learn from example.

My group has only met a few times outside of class, but from those meetings I see Steve as the one who practices shared leadership very well. He has a lot of experience with organizing, but he does not always take control of the meetings. He allows others in the group to express themselves and to come up with their own ideas and if they get stuck, he is able to jump in with possible solutions. Steve also takes the initiative to bring people together so that there is the opportunity to share and discuss thoughts like with the list serve group that he created.