

Lack of Respect; Targeting Women; Personality Problems

Francine Blanchet-Sadri

Participants of this group: Francine Blanchet-Sadri (scribe), Dennis Davenport, David Farmer, Joe Gallian, Stephen Hartke, Charles Johnson, Thomas Mattman, Sivaram Narayan, Javier Rojo, Zsuzsanna Szaniszló, David Uminsky, Michelle Wagner, and Stephen Wirkus (facilitator) discussed challenges they have faced in their undergraduate research activities and how they have overcome these challenges. After introducing themselves and their programs, they discussed mainly the following topics:

- *Lack of Respect* It was mentioned that there is lack of respect for level of research of the program, that some administrative personnel at some institutions even view it as a remedial mathematics program.

It was suggested to disseminate information such as putting on the web some technical reports and doing poster presentations to change the mentality of those administrators.

- *Females into Mathematics* The question was raised: “Is it a good idea to set aside programs only for females?” Although it may strengthen the number of women participating in REU programs, it may not be a nice choice for females to be only with women.

Some participants answered that these programs give a chance to a woman even if not as well prepared. Others mentioned that there was a problem to get females in programs that are not targeted only to women. Yet, others said that some of the female programs may not be as strong as some other programs.

It was mentioned that some institutions have put considerable effort to set workshops where there is a good percentage of women attending. An environment is thus provided where females can hear other females. Women do participate in these workshops, feel less isolated, and feel less pressure from men. Maybe women would be more willing to participate in some programs if the ratio of participation between males and females was closer to 50% men and 50% women. Topics may also influence women to choose a particular program. It was recommended that strong females should be involved in strong programs.

- *Personality Problems* Another topic of discussion was personality issues related to students and research assistants. Collaborative learning is a

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focus so problems occur with some anti-social students, etc. For instance, teams may end up getting broken by conflicting personalities.

The application process includes mathematical background, personal statements, letters of reference, etc. It was mentioned that the recommenders may indicate personality problems but that the letters cannot always be believed. It was suggested that REU directors should consider contacting recommenders for more information. It was also suggested that phone interviews may help to see if potential participants are “normal” individuals. However, some felt that these interviews could eliminate some very strong applicants. Program directors should talk with these anti-social students, should try to incorporate them, and should try to get other students to connect with them. As for research assistants, it was recommended to try to get some alumni of the program.

- *Application Form* Faculty who write recommendation letters usually attach their letter to the application form (if there is a form). It is too time consuming for them to fill out a form for a particular applicant. So the same letter is sent to every REU program!

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