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Transcript for Sampler Series, Episode 03: Navigating Bureaucracy 101

Released January 14, 2019

All 0:17

Welcome to STEMculture/podcast.

Dani 0:18

Oh, I fucked up!

Zach 0:23

Alright, we have an intro.

Dani 0:25

You guys, it's so warm in here!

Welcome to STEMculture podcast. Today we're talking about navigating bureaucracy with Dani, which is me and Zach.

Zach 0:32

That's me.

This episode is to remind people that change comes from within. Except for that nickel you ate as a kid. You're never going to see that again.

Dani 0:40

Welcome back from break everyone. We hope you had a break. We did. I did. I went home to California. How about you, Zach?

Zach 0:49

at the time of recording. I have no idea what my plans are. Why are you doing this to me? we're pretending like

I went home to visit my family. or something. Another state in my apartment, secluded myself from everyone. I'm playing video games. Choose your own story.

Dani 1:06

Oh, dear y'all. It's mid December. So we actually haven't been home yet. But we hope you had a good break. This is the first episode since 2019 happened. Do you awkwardly want to talk about what your resolution is?

Zach 1:18

My resolution is to graduate.

Dani 1:21

And

And that's also my resolution, I still have to publish, too, just a minor thing.

Alright, well, we are reso-looting, to graduate and to write papers.

Zach 1:36

If you want to send us your resolutions, contact us via Twitter.

Dani 1:39

So I want to just provide a disclaimer for this episode. We are not experts. This episode is going to discuss navigating bureaucracy from our point of view. But truthfully, there are many, many ways to do this. And what we're going to discuss this works for us and we want to hear how you navigate bureaucracy so you can tag us on Twitter @STEMculture, one word, or you can email us at stem culture podcast at gmail. com.

Zach 2:06

Alright, so first definitions what is bureaucracy and bureaucracy is defined by dictionary. com as excessive multiplication of uh concentrations of power, administrative bureaus, or administrators.

Dani 2:19

Also bureaucracy is a really hard word to spell and spell check won't help me that's how badly I spell it. But I've learned now

I've learned now so with that definition we do want to say there's a few bureaucracy kinds of bureaucracies we're not going to get to they're really going to have their own episode so bureaucracy when it comes to accommodations so like if you have a learning difference or you physically need help with something that's going to be its own episode that's that's really nuanced

and will actually come up in our next "in STEM" episode.

There's also going to be Title IX bureaucracy.

That will also have its own episode. And then also bureaucracy when it comes to your PI, your advisor, your mentor that will also have its own episode, so we won't really touch on those for this episode specifically.

Also, I'm going to say episode like 15 more times Episode Episode Episode.

Episode Episode

Zach 3:17

Episode.

This episode is brought to you by

Dani 3:20

Episode.

Zach 3:21

episode, so it's

Dani 3:24

okay. So briefly, Zach, in what ways have you navigated bureaucracy?

Zach 3:30

So I work on kind of the professional development end of STEM and so my job is to make sure that graduate students get the proper training and education they need for whether they're teaching as a first year or teaching as a fifth year and also those who are graduating and leaving to find a position in industry, government, or academia. So in order to do this, I put together two workshops with the help of multiple people. I won't mention the names because there's a lot and so in order to do this, though, I had to work together.

Send a bunch of emails, get everyone coordinated and try to get them all to agree to say, "Hey, we do need this, we need to get this accomplished one way or another." And it just takes time and effort to do that. And so that's working with multiple departments, including maybe for one training. We did all first years in the graduate school in STEM that six departments all in a single building, and we had to work to get them all agreed and go, "Hey, yeah, we'll meet you on that day. It's going to be a half day workshop. Let's get it over." And then others are for students graduating and going to a lecture position. And that required multiple departments and efforts to work together so that we have the best resources available to help us with this

Dani 4:38

nice.

Zach 4:40

How have you done

How have you navigated bureaucracy in the past?

Dani 4:45

so I've navigated bureaucracy in kind of the same- similar how to how you have where you have to not only figure out like, who you need to speak to, but they might be in different departments, they might be in different buildings.

They might, they might be at the department level or they might be at the graduate school level or they might be at the university level. So for me, I've also done some workshops, organized some speaker seminars. And it's interesting because some are easier than others. It just depends on how many people I have to go through and how much experience I've had going through it. So I work with a Women in Science and Engineering group. And so creating workshops and speaker seminars within that group is really easy because I don't even really need to get the Graduate School's approval because what we're doing is just creating space for workshops and creating space and times and getting building space to have speaker seminars. So that's over time has become quite easy. But then starting organizations which I have helped start a couple that takes a lot more organization

and then sometimes

Depending on what kind of organization we're trying to start, if it's at the departmental level versus at the graduate school level

that makes them easier or harder. PS is harder at the department level.

Zach 6:12

Really? I didn't expect that. I figured going higher up a tier would take more time.

Dani 6:17

Yeah, no, it definitely took much more time to get it started in our department, which I'll talk about a little bit more like later, which is kind of bizarre.

Zach 6:27

So

So how do you get involved in bureaucracy, but still get your research done?

Dani 6:33

So that's a really tough one. And I didn't get involved in bureaucracy until after my first full year and actually through my first semester of my second year, so a full year and a half into my PhD and I hadn't gotten involved in anything yet

and when I started getting involved is because I really felt strongly about getting involved in wanting to do these these things.

So especially when creating

our own science communication organization,

that took a lot of time to get off the ground and get started. But for me, it was really worth it. So I ended up actually putting more hours,

let's see, you know, so I would do my PhD things, so do my research stuff. And then I would work extra hours on these other endeavors. So the question that I asked myself is, is everything I'm doing now something I have to do? And the answer, of course, is no, I don't have to be doing everything that I'm doing now. But do I still want to do everything I'm doing? And if the answer is yes, then I keep doing it. But if I do need help, and this is something I really learned the past year is that if I need help, I need to learn to ask for it. And because these organizations have started with other people, and now other people are involved if I need help, if I need a weeks grace in anything I have people to ask.

And help me in that.

What about you, Zach?

Zach 8:03

So for me, there's kind of what I call the scheduling triangle. And this is a really bad example. And you shouldn't do this, you consider yourself more important, but I've always used it, which is there are three points to a triangle of those points. It is sleep, extracurriculars, and research. And

you can only choose two though, so which do you pick that day, that week, however, you're doing it, I normally just kind of dropped sleep to the wayside because I just I love caffeine so much. And I like that, jitteriness. I'm almost at the point where I could jitter through solid objects. But I haven't reached it yet.

but what I've done is I'll look at scheduling and a lot of emails. That's how I function for all of this. As I mentioned earlier, scheduling is okay, I have a calendar I don't even make decisions without looking at my phone anymore. So he says, Hey, can you do this but my calendars full can't make it sorry, or Yeah, I have a slot open. But when it comes to actual

like scheduling and working on this, I will say okay, well, I've got to do this.

Research today during these hours when everyone's in the building, and I have time to do it, or I'll do kind of, I wouldn't say busy work, but I'll work on kind of side projects during the day. Because I know every now and then I might be interrupted by someone else asking me a question or needing help on something. And then at night, when it's really quiet in my office or lab space, I get everything else I need to get done. And then I kind of fluctuate in my hours of when I start for the day. So if I'm working really late at night, I might not start at eight o'clock in the morning, the next day, I'll start at 10 or 11 whenever

I can get in and wake myself up. But it all comes to mainly keeping a schedule together. And if you feel that you're overbooked, then you need to start dropping something behind like Dani always ask, Is this something that I need to be doing right now? And if it's not something that's absolutely required in your time, drop it and come back to it later.

Dani 9:39

Yeah, remember your your best friend is the word "no." And "I need help."

So I guess that's more words than just one. Yeah, your best friend your best friend.

Zach 10:00

The best phrase is "no" and Dani can attest to this, I don't know that word very well.

Dani 10:05

Zach's bad at it.

Zach 10:06

I'm real bad. I think its genetic. So it's just a lot of "Oh yeah, I can help you with that." And then a lot of internal screaming have a voice going NOOOO.

So you just gotta be really good at time management. I know that when I started in grad school, I was kind of given the expectation of like, you don't have like a part time or full time job. You're expected to be researching, teaching and working 60 hours a week. That does include the weekend however, you might be spending maybe 16 hours one night in a lab, and then the next day you're only in the office for four hours because there's catching up on sleep or just taking time to yourself to write in a quiet location. And that's something you should communicate with with others is like, Okay, I need to be flexible with this. And that's kind of a conversation you have with your PI or your lab mates. You're saying like I'm unavailable at these times. I'm either working on research or I'm working on an

other project, and you just need to make sure that everyone else understands that when this is slotted, you're occupied.

Dani 11:06

Yep

Zach 11:06

I have a note on my desk that says, "This is my writing time. Please do not disturb. If I get distracted, you may throw something at me." I've only been hit once.

Dani 11:14

Oh, that's good.

Zach 11:15

I dodged the others.

Dani 11:17

For my writing group. I literally have to leave my office space. Otherwise, it's too distracting.

You should do that.

Zach 11:24

I'm not gonna make a comment on that. Because I was in that writing group for like, two weeks, and then I just get distracted.

Dani 11:29

Yeah, Zach doesn't. Well, it's also in the morning and you don't do mornings.

Zach 11:33

I don't like seeing the sunrise. I like it to be setting when I'm conscious.

Dani 11:36

Yeah,

Zach 11:37

You're right about me.

Dani 11:39

So Zach, what do you do if you want to change something in the department or in the university?

Zach 11:44

So in my experience, everybody loves a proposal. I know, STEM loves proposals when it comes to grant funding, and all sorts of stuff like that. So I've been asked repeatedly to putting a proposal together, stating why we need it, how we're going to implement it, what in this case, over the funding required to do it. So what money is required to get, say, a workshop off the ground? And then what resources are needed? So who needs to be involved? Do we need the room do need a TV, all that jazz and everything you need put together, in one. And that way when you present it to somebody, there's not any extra questions like, oh, how will you manage this? How will you do this, you say, "Oh, it's in proposal chapter," not chapter, they're never that long

Dani 12:22

Please!

Zach 12:24

So I've written three different proposals, three of which were all created with a lot of effort. And again, it's not just me, my MO is to find other people who think that this is the same problem that everyone has, or multiple people have. And the more people you toss on to it, to kind of give it that reinforcement, kind of like signing a petition is we're in favor of this, you should be in favor of it, too. Dani, what do you do if you want to change something in the department

or university?

Dani 12:56

So the way Dani functions, yes, I'm going to talk about myself in the third person

Zach 12:58

Why

Dani 12:58

I don't know. So the way I function is, I get really angry about something. And then

Zach 13:11

Dani SMASH!

Dani 13:14

but I get really angry about something. And then I want to do something. And I didn't know immediately, like Zach did about writing out a proposal, writing out an idea. The way I first started trying to get things changed at the department level first was, I thought I could just go to the leaders in our department. And I mean, like administration, and tell them my super great, amazing idea. Now, the problem is that it was just my idea. And I didn't have any input from the other graduate students or anybody else. And so those ideas never came to fruition, even if the administration like them. So that was a bad first approach.

But now, I know that if I want to get something done in, in my department, I really need to chat with the other graduate students first, and really get other people on board besides me, because it might just be I have this idea. But it's a shitty idea. That's absolutely possible. So other graduate students can really help me figure out if it's a good idea, they can contribute to the idea. And we can really come up with this proposal that Zach was talking about.

At that point, once we have a proposal, you might want to get some other people besides graduate students on board. And so this is when you can bring faculty on board

or somebody in the administration and see if they like your idea. So then comes the other part of who do you talk to first in your department, because there's a lot of people that have something to do with graduate school, or with being a graduate student in your department. So you have to figure out what that hierarchy is, so might be talking to, if you have a gr- graduate program director, or if you have a chair of your department, it's kind of like, who do you talk to first. So in our department it's kind of talking to the graduate program director first, because it's all graduate students stuff. And then if they like the idea of the proposal, then we can bring it to the chair as a next step. Okay. So once you've done that, you might actually need to be the person that goes and talks to the chair. So then you talk to the chair, and if they like the idea, then you can start implementing it. But really, you're still probably doing a lot of the work. But now you're doing it with the support of your department, which makes a big



difference, because their support might mean the difference between getting your idea going, and it falling flat.

Now, if it's at the university level, this is what I was saying earlier with Zach, I find it a lot easier, at least at our university. So if I have an idea, or like, we had this idea to have a science communication organization that's run by graduate students, for graduate students, where we go out into the community K to 12 schools, we also go to after-school groups, and go to museums. And we wanted to get this supported by the graduate school so that we could start getting other graduate students involved and going out in the community with us. And that took two meetings, and it was done. And it took us like a week to actually make, like, bring everything together and talk with each other and get it going forward. That was really easy. We had to talk to two people,

which was, which was amazing. And so that's perhaps the quirks of our university. But that made it really easy to get that going.

Zach 16:40

So for that, I'm wondering, how many people did you have already behind you for that? Did you approach it as just you? Or did you have a group of graduate students or others who, and maybe even a faculty member already who are like, I'm in support of this, let's move it forward.

Dani 16:53

Yeah, so this idea was really brought up probably most publicly by Keighley, who's also on the podcast. And she had actually posted on Facebook about it to see if there are other graduate students that were interested in joining her in this endeavor. And so myself, our friend Ankan, and our friend Cansu joined us in that endeavor. And the four of us came up with kind of how we were going to organize this what we had based this program off of, and when we actually met with somebody first, it was our graduate program director, because we were all in the same department just by accident. And so he was kind of like, "Well, that sounds like a great idea. But I am just in the biology department, if you want this to be broad, to all graduate students, or maybe all STEM graduate students, then you probably need to bring it to the graduate school." And so we did. And so we had a meeting with the graduate school, and we told them what we wanted to do. And if we could be kind of housed within the graduate school, because we did not want to be a student organization, because that's

a lot harder,

Zach 18:00

little bit more regulation that comes with that you might fall under maybe a different department or director for that. And so it's better to try to umbrella yourself where you're more easily accessible, especially if you're going to be kind of- not necessarily a club but an organization.

Dani 18:14

Yeah, and so this gave us a lot more freedom to be within the graduate school itself.

And really, by the end of the meeting, the question was, okay, well, what are you asking from the graduate school and all we were asking for was their blessing. At that point, we weren't asking for any money, but all you're asking for was legitimacy. So we wanted to be able to say that our University's Graduate School supports our endeavors. And that ended up making it much easier to get partners down the road like schools that wanted us to come and join them. Of course, it's been a year and a half since we started the organization. And now we're kind of going back and asking for more stuff. But now we have the stats behind what we're doing for them to be to actually want to give us more besides just legitimacy and one little website page.

Zach 19:03

Yes, and that's, that's what you just mentioned their stats. And those are very important, important, those are very important when you're dealing with a larger organization or department on your campus. They want that statistical information to show that what you're proposing is worth it or to show that what you're trying to fix is an actual problem. So if you can go in and say, "Hey, I have had an event this semester hosted by my department that went really well, I think this would be very beneficial for the entire university, or maybe all of the STEM students, how do we get that pushed forward," as long as you can say, "Here's some of the feedback we got." So say you're working kind of with a small organization, that's maybe science communication. If you have a bunch of students there. I know this sounds slightly annoying, but have some paperwork regarding feedback. Maybe you have a pre survey and a post survey that can be digital, however, you want to set it up, or that could be a handout. And as long as you come up with this and start talking to those faculty, staff members, you can say, "Hey, this is what we are looking at. This is the information we've collected, people are interested."

The other question I had is, it seems that you're I don't know, if I'm anti social, it might be that I worked in a lot of different departments. But I don't see like a large communication venue for a lot of students. Or it might exist, but I'm just not part of it. And it made it sound like I posted this on Facebook to start to talk to all the bio students how to just set that up. Did you just kind of say, Oh, it's available and invite everyone in the department? Or was that kind of a channel already available when you got here?

Dani 20:35

Do you mean in terms of how we started the organization?

Zach 20:37

Yes. 'Cause you said like it was posted on Facebook. Yes. Anybody interested? Was that an already available resource? Or did you set that up as well?

Dani 20:44

Okay. Yeah, so that was an already available resource. Our university has a, I think it's a Facebook group that is just called university graduate students, for our university in particular. So that was what, that's where Keighley posted for the first time. But it's pretty telling that the only people that answered her were people that knew her already. So other biology students. And what was really hard in the beginning our first semester, and even our second semester, we really only had graduate students from the biology department that were interested in being part of the group. And only after we had stats, and it could actually show how successful we weren't also brought in our message to these other

departments and also they were getting used to hearing from us this time, then they then we started getting a lot more people interested, especially when we could start telling them, "Hey, as a graduate student, you can be part of the science communication organization, you can volunteer your time," which of course, graduate students hear, "Volunteer your time" and start running away. But then we say stuff like, "Hey, have you ever written a grant, have you ever had to write out the broader impact statement for your grant, guess what the science communication organization absolutely fits within that." And so now that we're getting that message out, now, we have representative members from every science department in our building, which is six plus some in business and entrepreneurship as well as a mathematician. So we're getting there.

Zach 22:14

And you want to have those broader impact statements. And that's something that you as a graduate student can respect and appreciate, as well as your department, your PI and the university as a whole, because a lot of these large funding organizations look for that as in "how are we reaching out how are we going to get this message and information across to the general public." And then as a great way to promote your organization, if you can find a way to work that into what you're trying to start that is the great foundation to lay it on top of

Dani 22:43

Yeah, because then it's not just people just graduate students that are interested in science communication, and doing science communication, but it broadens it to graduate students who are trying to write grants for broader impacts. And then not only is there a drive from the graduate students to join the organization, but their advisors might actually be pushing them to join as well, or Well, maybe not pushing, but suggesting heavily.

Please join

Zach 23:12

Here are our top tips and tricks for dealing with bureaucracy.

Dani 23:15

So our first one is don't reinvent the wheel, which also means do your research. So there might be other organizations that are already doing something about the topic you're interested in. So some graduate schools actually had graduate student associations or societies. So you may be able to join that and do some good from within, or you can ask them for help and planning an event that you would like to plan. And you can find their website and read about them and save yourself a ton of work,

Zach 23:45

the next step would be to work as a team, this is not a single person's effort. If you're trying to change the world, you could not do it alone. So with that, you should always ask for help when you need it, particularly with those who have experienced and that's again, going back to not reinventing the wheel, you should always ask for help if it's absolutely necessary, even if it's not, because there's always someone who's going to have more experience than you.

Dani 24:05

Yeah. And then when you ask for help, because you have suddenly a pressing research project, you know, you have this team that you can ask their help, and you can get your research done. And then you can jump back into it when you can,

Zach 24:18

it's also important to see if you can get faculty/staff on board with you. If you have an idea that you think someone higher up would approve, then you want to have, again, that support that you need to get it passed up the ranks.

Dani 24:30

Yeah. And it might be that they're like, your actual department has a graduate student Society of some sort. And a lot of those actually have a faculty sponsor, or maybe your program has a faculty member, that's kind of in charge of making sure it's working properly. So like a graduate program director, these are all people that would be good to get in contact with. So the third tip we have is make your plan of attack. So like Zach was saying earlier, this might be in the form of a proposal. And in that proposal, you want to make sure you know the answer to the question that I personally get asked all the time, when I have new ideas. "What's the ask, What are you asking for?" make it really clear, and that'll be helpful,

Zach 25:15

and also make your proposals as short as possible. There's a lot of people who have to see this err, see this proposal in it's solid form, and make sure you've refined enough that you can get the point across as soon as possible.

Dani 25:27

Yeah. So in your proposal you might have a few paragraphs explaining, explaining what you're asking for but you might also have a budget if that's what you're asking for. Or if you're asking for time, you might have a calendar of events,

Zach 25:39

I would always recommend a budget.

Dani 25:41

Yes, budgets are good. And also when it comes to the plan of attack, you know, don't only think about what you want, but what they want, because then it'll make it really easy for them to say, yes, that's the whole that's the whole idea. When you're trying to deal with bureaucracy, and you want to get something done, and you want to change STEM culture, which we're assuming you do since you're listening,

then you really want to make it easy for them to say, yes,

Zach 26:05

you want it to be mutually beneficial for both you and those who are supporting you.

Dani 26:08

Yeah, so for all those bio nerds out there. mutualism

Zach 26:12

I'm a chemist I don't know.

No, I'm just kidding. I made that joke earlier. That's why it's written down.

Dani 26:16

I know I stole it from-

Zach 26:17

Our next tip is to be polite, and professional. And you want to remember that bureaucracy can move slowly, there are some of those who are involved that really want to move things quickly. And they'll get it done. Like Dani mentioned, it took maybe a meeting or two and then within a week an organization was founded. There are some of those that this might have to go through multiple chains of command in order for you to be successful. So you have to be polite and professional the entire time and do not jump that chain, you can ruin your chances by jumping the chain of command. And so you want to make sure you're going from the bottom all the way to the top to make sure you're successful all along the way.

Dani 26:52

And think of it this way, bureaucracy moves slowly, but it moves even slower if you're an asshole.

Zach 26:56

Amen to that. And lastly,

Dani 26:59

you're going to make mistakes, and it's going to be okay, I can tell you, I have personally made many mistakes. And in the end, I've had to it takes time, but not take it personally and really learn from it. So if I wrote an email and ended up coming off rude, you know, I can learn from that and learn exactly how to write an email where it's clear what I want Anyway, you can learn from your mistakes, and that's okay. And that that's also coming back to our, our second point about working in a team. You can help each other learn from your mistakes. You know what went wrong here at this interaction? Could you read this email? Was it bad, and then y'all can help each other

Zach 27:37

or better yet, before you send that email, have someone else read it, because you know how you sound to yourself. And it might not sound rude. But I've been told I've been very sarcastic a lot, mainly in my teaching reviews. So that's, that's where you want to have that secondary check of "Does this come off, inappropriate or rude? I want to make sure that I approach this but the most professionalism available and possible for me."

Dani 28:00

yep. All right, Zach. So I would like you to share with us what's the best success you had with bureaucracy and the worst failure you've had.

Zach 28:10

So my best successes have probably been those workshops. And I know I've kind of talked about I've done other things, I swear, it's just those are the kind of the largest things that take a large amount of effort to put together and I'm talking like the president with my hands everywhere.

So I've been most proud of those workshops, because it takes a lot of effort to coordinate all of those people being in the same location at once, for the kind of the end of year end of your graduate career going on to lecture positions. That's a two day workshop. And a lot of the time it would require five fellows working alongside to get this done. And I'm proud to say that even though I've left that department that I was working with, it has carried on for the past year or two without me being there. And that's something I'm really proud of being something that's been continued over and over again. And I hope the STEM TA training does the same. I don't know if I'm going to be here in the fall for that. But I'm hoping someone who is either taking my position or those who are already, not staying behind, but those that are already gone through, it will stay and pick up the slack when I leave. And that might be my responsibility. And it is my responsibility to make sure that that carries on. As for my failures, that first year teaching workshop took me four years to get off the ground. After my first year of teaching here, having that experience, because I taught for four years of undergrad, I didn't give lectures, I was a teaching assistant. And that's the same position I hold here. And so for that, I had the experience, I knew how to communicate with students, I know how to give us quick lecture on the board, give a demonstration, how to grade and stay on top of it. But everybody else coming in, or a lot of people coming in, had no idea how to do that. And to fix that I wanted to do this workshop. One of the benefits was that my own department asked me to do this teaching training a year prior to this workshop taking place. However, I wanted to have that broader impact of everyone needs this training. It just took me so long to get it off the ground. And a lot of it had to do with timing, and we'll kind of discuss that in a moment. But what have been your biggest successes and failures.

Dani 30:09

Alright, so my best success, we just got confirmation today that it worked. But for our science communication organization, we were putting so much time into it. And there's three of the co founders have have put in this time. So much time we calculated it since the inception. And it's almost 600 hours of time that we put into this organization, the three of us combined. And I honestly was kind of desperate for some extra cash because I don't have a roommate this semester. And I thought is there any way we can make these a paying position because there is a lot of extra work we did the three co founders do in order to keep this organization moving forward and growing. Maybe there's a way to make these paying positions so that this organization continues after we leave.

So we actually targeted three different organizations within our university or maybe not organizations, departments, and not necessarily like a biology department, but other departments within the university as a whole. And we sent them letters saying, "Hey, we worked almost 600 hours we're doing this thing that specifically answers your mission statement saying that you want to support this, we should meet and talk about helping fund our organization." And after working on that this whole

semester, and working on our approach and our proposals and working together as a team, we found some money that wasn't being used. And we then connected with the graduate school and said, "Hey, we found this money that is not being used, and they've agreed to split it among the three of us to pay us for five hours of work every week in regards to this science communication organization." And the graduate school said, "Cool, that's awesome." Obviously, they love it. They don't have to put out money for it. But then we're like, "Wait!"

Zach 32:09

There's more!

Dani 32:11

Wait. We would also like you to look at this budget and fund this budget every year. And they said yes to that, too. So that has been by far the greatest success. As for the failure

really, the worst failures are either no answer, or just No, not interested. But I will give something a little bit more specific to that. So I think this might have been a couple years ago now, I was feeling a lot of feelings,

as you can imagine, in 2016, and I got really frustrated and I thought, "Hey, maybe I can help my department and maybe all the STEM departments. If I go through the internet and find these articles that are specifically about how it is to be a woman or an underrepresented minority in STEM, especially as it's related to sexual harassment. I can find these articles online, I can curate them I can give little summaries about each and every article," and then I emailed them to every chair and graduate program director in our building that's related to STEM which is literally all of them. And I got zero answers.

That was very disheartening. Oh, actually, I lied, I got one answer. That was a thank you.

But the person that answered I know the person that answered and said, Thank you actually knew them. But none of the other chairs and graduate program directors responded because they don't know me. And what are they supposed to do with that information? I had said in my email, oh, maybe you guys can share this with your faculty and staff. But they're not going to read that that's extra time. You know. So this was two years ago, it wasn't the best hatched plan. But as you can imagine, I was really frustrated. And it's still something I haven't quite figured out how to address except that, you know, as I'm thinking about it, or as I've been thinking about it the last six months, maybe it's something that would be better where it's a seminar. So we invite a speaker that will speak on these subjects, and people that want to engage with it will come. And so really, it's, I mean, is it a failure? Yes. But nobody screamed at me.

Zach 34:28

No

Dani 34:28

That's awesome. Nobody's ever screamed at me, for me coming forth with an idea. I've never been censured for coming forth with ideas. It's just either a no or no answer. So

you can do it.

Zach 34:42

And on that note, of just kind of cold emailing somebody for an experience of that is, and with mine is I've changed positions a few times within the university. And in doing so, I'm the new face that no one knows. And in order for people to really start working with me, I have to be introduced by somebody who knows everybody else. And so because of that, I'll be introduced by my boss or higher up than saying, "This is Zach this is his new responsibility, he is replacing this person who previously have this position, we expect him to coordinate," and they just essentially give them my job description again, and that's something that you would like to kind of be the foundation of that. And like, how would you do that over again, if you were to not necessarily the workshop, but if you wanted to contact those department chairs? How would you do that? What would you do different this time?

Dani 35:31

So that's a really good question. Um, I think primarily, I would try and approach them from one of my organizations so I could say, I'm Dani and I'm emailing you on behalf of like Women in Science and Engineering and we are we want to know if you'd be interested in meeting with us probably on a like a one to one meeting where we can discuss this and see if they're interested in coming to let's say I did want to do like seminar speaker hey we have someone coming to speak on intersectionality and I would really like you specifically to invite everyone in your department to come to that. And you know, are you interested in having that conversation? So yeah, I think definitely coming from a specific organization and being like, Hi, I am this person. But especially now it's been two years. I think all the chairs know me by now because I'm very irritating and persistent. And so

Zach 36:28

Knowing is the first step.

Dani 36:31

I mean, honestly, I'm sure they see my name. And they're like, Argh, this bitch again.

but having having them know who I am now does make a lot of stuff easier. But yeah, definitely using your contacts and coming from like, I am coming to you from this position of being a graduate student within this organization. Are you interested in talking with me, and especially when it's just an email to one person, I think it's a lot more directed.

Zach 37:00

One of the important steps also, is if you're coming speak as somebody speaking on behalf of an organization, make sure that organization knows you're sending that email.

So if there are multiple, if you're the head of that organization, and no one else questions you then by all means, shoot that email and the benefit of everyone there. But if there are multiple people involved, like, say, your departmental wide organization, then you need to say, I'm coming to you on behalf of all of us. We've had a meeting, give your credentials and give the clout behind your statement.



Dani 37:08

Yeah

Yeah

Zach 37:27

Never just say, I have the access to this email account. I'm going to send an angry email. Yeah, be careful with how you speak. And again, it comes to professionalism and politeness. If you burn a bridge, there is no rebuilding that one unless you've got a lot of second chances, and people to back you up.

Dani 37:44

Mm hmm. And I'll say one other thing,

sometimes I will not. Sometimes, a lot of times, emails are very easy to ignore. And so instead of asking someone to respond to an email, you can actually ask them for a meeting instead. "Hi, I would like to meet with you about this subject on behalf of whatever organization are you available this and this date?"

And depending on if you know, the person or not, you might actually just be able to be like, "Hi, I made a meeting for us and I checked your schedule you're free at this time. So we're meeting now."

Zach 38:15

You're not free anymore.

So that's another good step is particularly if you're trying to schedule a meeting, it's probably best to provide your availability first.

Dani 38:27

Yes.

Zach 38:27

And just say "Do any of these times work with you?" Never ask, "What are you available for?" Just say, "I'm available for these times. Do any of these work for you?"

Dani 38:35

Yeah.

Zach 38:35

And then hopefully you can match it up. For universities that use online calendars or faculty members that use online calendars. It's really great to go in and say, "Hey, I'm interested in making an appointment. Are you available in these time slots? I've already confirmed that with calendar." Granted, there's sometimes I forget to add things to my calendar. And that just means I'm not going to show up. Sorry, yeah, it's not your fault. It's mine.

Dani 38:58

So with all that being said, we, you know, we really do hope that you want to change grad student culture and STEM culture with us. And, and for us, these tactics have worked and again, the worst that's ever happened is somebody ignoring me, which personally I need so much attention. So someone ignoring me is bad enough for me. But if you have other tips and tricks for us, you can let us know on Twitter and our email account.

Thanks so much for listening. Next time, we'll introduce our first in the in STEM series: disabilities and learning differences in STEM. This series is meant to portray stories of people who are frequently underrepresented in STEM so we can all learn about different experiences.

Zach 39:42

You can find us on Twitter at STEMculture, one word, or email us at STEM culture podcast at gmail dot com. If you like what we're doing, please rate us on iTunes to help more people interested in improving STEM culture find us. If you'd like to support us you can find our Patreon on our website plus show notes, articles to STEMulate, and links to our YouTube channel of transcribed shows at STEMculture Podcast dot com. Until next time, don't forget to consensually hug a grad student ...or at least buy them a coffee

Dani 40:08

A dung beetle walks into a bar and says, "excuse me is this stool taken?"

Zach 40:15

Bathroom humor.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>