

SACSA RESEARCH TIP

Managing Your Research Project: Gantt Charts

James Orr and Andrea Michelle Perkins

Student Affairs is a profession that requires its professionals to work long and odd hours as well as manage several projects. These demands often provide challenges to those seeking to write dissertations, theses, presentations, or journal articles. Despite this, in order for the profession to continue serving students, research is important. Thus, it is imperative that those seeking to write research properly manage their projects.

Effectively managing projects can allow one to work on several projects without being overwhelmed. Managing projects goes beyond simply developing a research topic and gathering the data. Effectively managing a research project using project management principles involves establishing a plan to complete the research project, meeting the deadlines that are established and monitoring the progress of the project. This monitoring allows one to be prepared for something to go wrong, and it will assist in allowing time for others to review the author's work.

Managing research projects can be done by using a Gantt chart. Gantt charts are helpful; they make it easier to establish the order that tasks need to be carried out in order to have a successful end product. Gantt charts are popular amongst those in the project management profession. These charts allow a visual representation of when a project needs to be completed as well as steps to complete the project.

When planning to do a chart, one first must make a list of all the tasks that must be completed in order to conduct the research project. It is then important to make a list of sub tasks beneath each of the tasks that need to be accomplished. In addition to this, it

is important to be aware of what resources are needed in order to complete the research. Advanced utilization of Gantt charts allows one to input the resources needed as well as cost that may be associated with those resources. Once all of the tasks are listed, a tentative date should be set for each of the tasks to be completed. Once these items have been completed, one will be able to fill in the sections required to complete the Gantt chart.

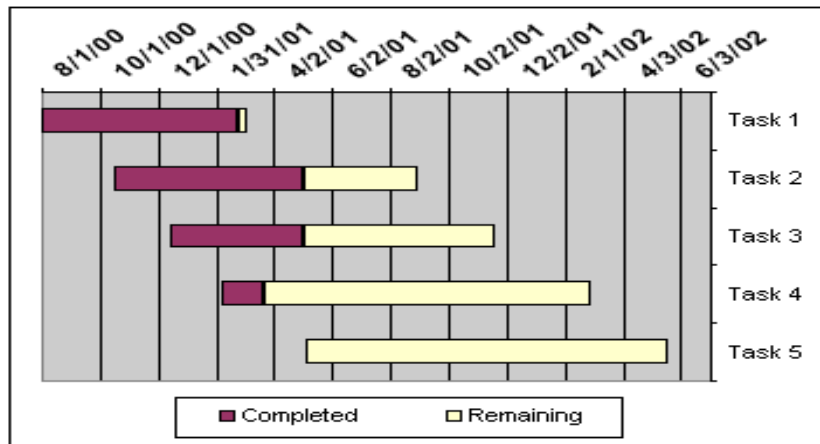
The chart will allow a graphical means for one to evaluate whether the tasks are being completed in a timely manner. While on the front end of conducting research this can be time consuming, creating the chart will assist the researcher in staying on task and completing a solid research project in a timely manner. Utilizing this method when conducting research may also make it easier to manage several research projects or to conduct research projects with several people.

Creating a Gantt chart Using Excel

A simple and inexpensive method to create a Gantt chart of your own is through utilizing Microsoft Excel. To do this, the list of objectives or tasks to be accomplished throughout the duration of the research project must be input into the system. This list should appear in the left hand column of the Excel spreadsheet. The next column should contain start dates corresponding to the task to be accomplished. Afterwards, it is vital to decide how long each task should take and input it into the spreadsheet. For example, a researcher can schedule the literature review in a research project to take three weeks to accomplish. In this way, the progression of the various parts of the project can be tracked day by day or month by month on the spreadsheet. The third column is the “Completed”

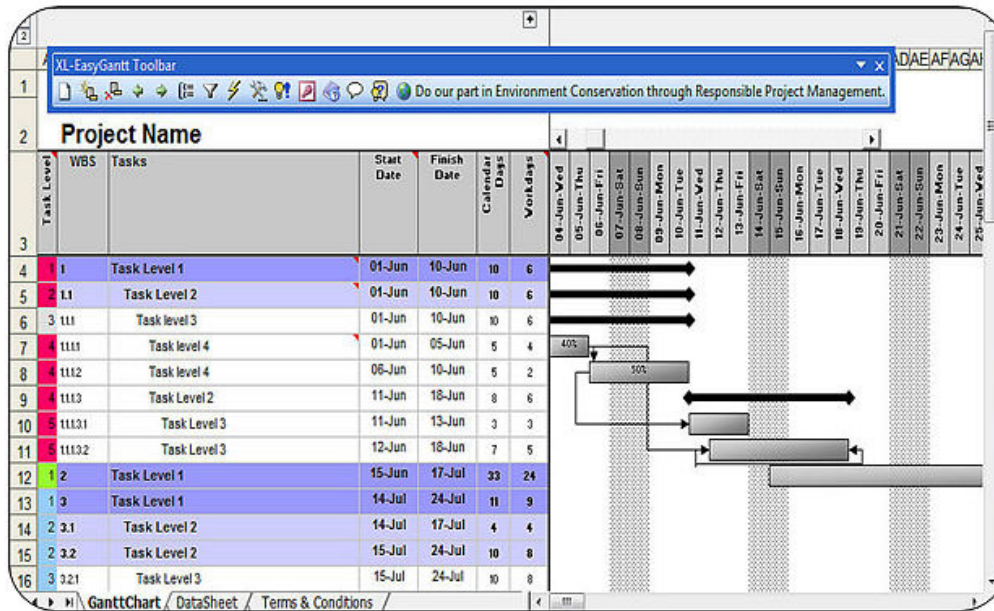
portion of the project which typically represents one day, but may represents weeks, months or years. The fourth column is the “Remaining” portion of the project.

This method is meant to be updated and monitored almost daily in order for the project to be kept on track. While using Excel is very easy, it does not have as much information or as many monitoring tools available as other software. A step by step guide to creating a Gantt chart in Excel can be found at the Microsoft Office website on the following link: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel/HA010346051033.aspx>



Creating a Gantt Chart Using Online Templates

In addition to creating a Gantt chart using Excel, you may also download templates from the Internet or use online systems. We have listed below a picture of a Gantt chart and links to templates.



<http://www.xleasygantt.com/>

<http://ganttproject.biz/>

<http://www.viewpath.com>