Effective Faculty – Assistant Interactions
Developed by the CALS Senior Associate Deans’ Office for
CALS New Faculty Orientation

Below are some tips on building an effective relationship with your assistant. These suggestions came from current administrative assistants in the College.

- **Communication is key.** Your assistant is an asset. Developing a good working relationship with this person will make your job easier. If you have preferences for how various daily tasks are accomplished, let your assistant know. Be willing to listen to his/her suggestions of how things have worked in the past.

- **Set priorities.** Communicate with your assistant on your expectations for his/her position and be clear. Realize that besides being your assistant, he/she is juggling other responsibilities for other faculty, multiple projects, daily tasks, etc. Work together to set priorities for projects and daily work.

- **Keep your assistant informed.** Share as much information as possible. Copy your assistant on relevant emails. Consider inviting your assistant to your lab, your course, or an Extension activity so they will have a better understanding of what you do.

- **Share your calendar with your assistant.** Let him/her know your daily whereabouts so he/she can give an intelligent response to your colleagues and students who inquire about your whereabouts and when you might return. It reflects badly on you and your assistant if the only response he or she can give is “I don’t know.” Give your assistant your contact information (home phone, cell phone) if you work away from the office in case there is an urgent situation. Trust your assistant to make simple decisions in your absence.

- **Regular meetings** with your assistant may be a good idea. This is a useful way to make sure deadlines are being met, projects are on track, and review your schedule.

- **Working style.** Are you “Plan-Ahead Pam” or “Last-minute Larry”? Think about how your assistant can help you work more effectively. Plan in advance for upcoming deadlines. Break large projects into steps. Can information be gathered by your assistant for upcoming grant proposals, coursework, Extension workshops in advance? Can preliminary steps be taken for the big project you are planning? Advanced planning by you will create a happier work environment for your assistant.

- **Be realistic.** Is the task you are giving your assistant reasonable? Can it be achieved in the time given? You should have some awareness of the time commitment and expertise involved to accomplish the task even if you do not know all the details to complete it yourself. If you are unsure, ask your assistant.

- **Listen.** Your assistant has education and experiences different than your own. He or she is also tapped into a completely different network of contacts. Sometimes the biggest ideas come from unexpected sources. Be willing to listen to his/her ideas or suggestions related to your work. Ask questions if your assistant approaches you with an idea. He/she is trying to be helpful. Encouraging his/her participation in your work can benefit both of you. He/she will feel more satisfied in his/her position and you stand to gain new ideas.

- **Mentoring.** Provide continuous feedback to your assistant on his/her performance. Conduct an annual performance appraisal. Find out what your assistant’s goals are related to his/her position and career. Be supportive of his/her goals and suggest ways for him/her to achieve them.

- **Be nice.** Be sensitive to others and their lives, needs, etc. Maintain your sense of humor and be patient. Realize that your assistant is likely already working for several other people and is adjusting to a new faculty member’s routines, demeanor, and working style.