



National Sea Grant Academy: Building Professional Capacity While Increasing Network Collaboration

One of the goals of the National Sea Grant College Program is “to produce a highly trained workforce.” This goal should include an investment internally, to ensure that professionals in the Sea Grant Extension network are technically trained to design, implement, and evaluate effective extension, technology transfer, and education programs that meet the needs of the marine and coastal clientele groups that they serve.

In 2001, the Assembly of Sea Grant Extension Program Leaders produced *Fundamentals of a Sea Grant Program*. This publication covered the “basics” needed by network program leaders to carry out and manage an effective outreach program.

The Assembly also recognized the need for an intensive “face-to-face” training of newly hired Sea Grant Professionals that would contribute to their professional development by providing a foundation in the NOAA Sea Grant culture, and fundamentals of Sea Grant extension philosophy and skills.

Through discussions between the Assembly and the National Sea Grant Office, the first Athelstan Spilhaus National Sea Grant Academy was convened in 2005.

Thirty extension professionals from 21 Sea Grant Programs participated in the first academy. A second academy was convened in 2009, with 32 extension professionals from 20 states in attendance, as well as a participant from Japan.

Leveraging of funding sources and partnerships provided the means for the academy to occur. The National Sea Grant Office, the Assembly, and each participating Sea Grant program provided support for



2009 Academy participants complete a strategic planning exercise. Florida Sea Grant photo.

this two-week program. The NOAA Coastal Services Center and the Florida, Illinois-Indiana, Louisiana and Maryland Sea Grant programs provided staff who served as Academy coordinators and trainers.

Impacts, Outcomes and Benefits

Participants were surveyed following Academy to see if overall goals were met.

- 1) *To improve the knowledge and skills needed for professionals working in Sea Grant Extension.* 100% indicated that this objective was met extremely well or very well.
- 2) *To provide information critical to your career as a Sea Grant professional.* 91% indicated that this objective was met extremely well or very well.
- 3) *To provide a national perspective on the role of Sea Grant within NOAA and the Department of Commerce.*

(continued)

90% indicated that this objective was met extremely well or very well.

4) *To instill a Sea Grant ethos among Academy participants.* 100% indicated that this objective was met extremely well or very well.

5) *To encourage the pursuit of lifelong learning.* 86% indicated that this objective was met extremely well or very well.

Graduates of the program have assumed new leadership positions. Six graduates are now Sea Grant Extension directors or assistant directors (TX, LA, NH, IL-IN, MN, PA).

All participants recommended that new Sea Grant extension professionals attend the Academy.

What Participants Have To Say

One of the measurements of success is how the individuals perceived the utility of the training, as well as how they are now using the new knowledge and skills. All participants have indicated that they are using the information in their extension activities. Selected comments from participants from a follow-up survey conducted one year after the 2005 Academy.

“...I feel that because of the Academy experience I have had the confidence to try more challenging extension programs that may have otherwise been too overwhelming without the proper strategic approach or facilitation skills. Additionally, regional efforts in my extension area have been greatly enhanced through networking with other specialists in my region. As a new extension specialist, the Academy provided me with the fundamental principles of how to be a successful extension professional...” (2005 participant, South Carolina).

“...I feel this training has pushed me forward several years-worth of experience and knowledge. I am a more effective educator because of the training...” (2005 participant, Minnesota).

“...I have used the logic model to write a grant and received funding. I set goals and objectives for a two-day workshop and conducted evaluation of a workshop. This was an invaluable experience. I now have a network of people to contact for



2009 students learn hands-on techniques for conducting on-the-water exercises. Florida Sea Grant photo.

“...I was able to apply my training when I facilitated a multi-statewide (and \$20 million study) rollout of the results of a 10-year study of contaminants in Lake Michigan to managers in 4 states. Without this training I doubt I would have been as confident or effective in this effort...”
(2005 participant, Illinois-Indiana).

collaboration, advice, and support since we work on similar projects throughout the country. Having this network helps you to look outside of the geographic area you work into see the larger goals you are working toward...”(2005 participant, University of Southern California).

“...The academy was invaluable! It was particularly valuable to “pick the brains” of the veterans in a setting where they could provide their full attention. Funding the academy as a yearly or every-other-year basis should be a very high priority for Sea Grant and NOAA! The use of the logic model, meeting planning and facilitation are two (of the things I use). I’m sure I have used about everything covered in one way or another...” (2005 participant, New Hampshire).

Contact:

Mike Spranger, Associate Director
Extension and Education
spranger@ufl.edu