

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY



Managing a Global University IT Network

Rita Schnepf has been leading technology projects at Pepperdine University for nearly 30 years—back when technology meant the telephone. Today she's leading a team of over 90 IT pros and client vendors on countless network engineering, cloud and software integration projects to power an increasingly global university.

Pepperdine is a small, Christian University based in Malibu, CA with several more campuses in California, Florence, Switzerland, China and South America serving nearly 12,000 students total. She leads the university's IT department projects which mainly means she's busy, as she puts it, "keeping the lights on."

Rita's "rapid-response" tasks along with longer, multi-year projects have found a home in ProjectManager.com. Her team of 45 IT pros in a department of over 90 use ProjectManager.com daily to manage these projects both small and large, while the university leadership and over 60 client-level access users love it for visibility. For over 3 years, and they've clocked over 250 projects, and countless tasks in the tool.

Rita's ongoing projects involve maintaining and trouble-shooting the university's wide area networks (WAN) and WiFi networks, in addition to managing cloud vendors globally.

Rita's team organizes projects at the portfolio level. Every Thursday, her team is tasked with updating their timesheets and tasks in ProjectManager.com. The CIO encourages everyone to use ProjectManager.com because he "can get a bird's eye view across all our projects."

"We love seeing not only the bird's eye view, but also that you can break it down to the project level," she continues. And while many team members also use Google for some of their work management, Rita says, when it comes to reporting "Google is just too hard. It's like herding cats."

The team heavily relies on the Dashboard view of the project progress, "so you can easily see when a project or task is 'going into the red'." She'll then shoot their team member an email to see how she can help them and inquire into the problem.

"I try to help people out and stay positive," she says. "I mean, these are busy people. They're IT pros, consultants, and putting out fires."

Rita says that working on projects "is a luxury" for her team, as they spend a lot of time with her proverbial "keeping the lights on" type work. Because the university has many external vendors for different aspects of data management, like online course sign-up tools and other cloud vendors, Rita's team is involved in task-heavy ongoing maintenance projects. Such rapid response work means that one team member has to "completely drop the project they're working on to go fix a campus dorm modem," for example.

Still, Rita and her team find time for "juicy projects," the year-long or several months' long projects that enable them to "be more innovative." Her team has just completed a 3-year long CRM integration with over 60 client-level users. "I love that you can control what a person sees," she says, and notes that she has been increasingly sharing access to select views of her projects to not just clients, but other departments within the university, as well. It allows the team to share ideas about project management processes and collaborate on relevant project data.

Her team has also been finishing up a 1-year Google integration project, and Rita is ready to explore ProjectManager.com's integrations features with Google and Gmail.

She's come a long way from 3-way calling.