Fostering a Collaborative Learning Environment: Building and Assessing Student Cooperation

Lara Schwartz (SPA-Government and Director, Project on Civil Discourse)
What are the benefits of collaborative learning?

- Fosters classroom conversation
- Improves student professionalism
  - Accountability
  - Time management
  - Communication
  - Problem-solving
- Universal design
  - Plays to individual strengths
  - Offers alternatives to large-group engagement
- Deepens understanding of material
- Cultivates respect for peers
- Develops the trust necessary for tough conversations
Challenges

- K-12 and college admissions emphasizes individual work
- Current political era
  - Mistrust of people with different views
  - Erosion of cooperation
  - False equivalency / all ideas welcome myths
- Technology
  - Texting is less like face-to-face than phone conversations
  - Public shaming and group think on social media
- Imposter syndrome and expert complex
- Bad experiences with collaborative work
Building teamwork into courses

• Lay the groundwork—transparency about assessment, group work, shared values, community standards, and discourse.

• Small group problem-solving exercises (include in class participation).

• Work with students on Blackboard discussion forums.

• Peer critique and editing (assessed).

• Student participation in evaluation.
  • Provide clear rubrics
  • Incorporate appealing to / persuading peers into assignment.

• Offer collaborative options for assessed projects.

• Group projects
  • Assessments
  • Q&A
  • Debrief
Assessments

Self-assessment and suggested grade: What grade do you believe ...

What grade do you believe you earned for class participation?

In answering this question, consider the following:

- Attendance and timeliness;
- Additional participation through blackboard, email, or office hours;
- Supporting a classmate’s learning process by explaining material or continuing course discussions outside of class;
- Challenging yourself to read deeply;
- Arguing both sides of an issue;
- Preparing for class every day;
- Listening respectfully and engaging with classmates’ ideas;
- Challenging yourself to meet your personal goals for speaking, listening, being open to new ideas, accepting criticism, or some other aspect of participating;
- Quality / quantity of work on supplemental exercises;
- Taking the initiative to learn more about a course concept that interests you;

- Anything else that you believe contributed to our learning community or improved your skills (specify).
Assessing collaborative work
Group project assessment

1. **Multiple Choice: Group meetings: When my group met, I attend...**
   - **Question:** When my group met, I attended.
   - **Answer:** Every time.
   - I missed a meeting but let people know in advance and found out what tasks...
   - I missed a meeting without notice.
   - I missed more than one meeting.

2. **Multiple Choice: Contributions: My contributions toward the...**
   - **Question:** My contributions toward the group’s final project.
   - **Answer:** I volunteered for some tasks and completed everything on time.
   - I did what the group asked me to do, and completed it on time.
   - I either did not complete all I was supposed to or worked behind schedule.
   - Someone else had to complete my work, my work was significantly late.

3. **Multiple Choice: Group’s assessment of me: My group members would**
   - **Question:** My group members would
   - **Answer:** Definitely want to work with me again.
   - Probably want to work with me again, assuming I communicated better or...

4. **Essay: Explain group's assessment of working with you: Explain why your group...**
   - **Question:** Explain why your group would or would not want to work with you again. Be specific.
   - **Answer:**

5. **Multiple Choice: My group: Would you want to work ...**
   - **Question:** Would you want to work with your group again?
   - **Answer:**
     - I would definitely want to work with my group again.
     - I would want to work with some group members but not others.
     - I would not want to work with anyone in my group again.

6. **Essay: Explain assessment of group: Explain why you would or&nb...**
   - **Question:** Explain why you would or would not want to work with this group or any of its members. Be specific.
   - **Answer:**

7. **Essay: Group project grade: if you wish, explain someth...**
   - **Question:** If you wish, explain something you think I should know about your project.
   - **Answer:**
# Rubric

**Name:** Group project  
**Description:** This will be how your group project is scored.

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<tr>
<th>Grid View</th>
<th>List View</th>
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### Grid View

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Questions?