Prepare Students for Group Work

Overview

Group work can help students build strong collaborative skills that are considered essential for success in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2013). However, without careful planning and clear instructions, group work can end up frustrating students and make them feel like their time is not being used productively. As faculty, it's not enough to assume that students know how to effectively work together, to organize their time, or to delegate tasks. In fact, many students have never worked together in a group before, and some may need to significantly develop their collaborative skills (Burke, 2011). To ensure that your students get the most out of group work, consider implementing the following strategies:

- **Discuss your rationale for using group work.** Students may not be aware of the benefits of collaborative work, so it is valuable to explain to them what they can expect to get out of this type of work and how it will help them achieve course learning goals.
- **Give group members time to get to know each other:** To work together effectively, students need to develop trust. Building in time for icebreakers or other team building activities will help set students up for success.
- **Explain the group project carefully.** Provide students with explicit directions regarding what the group work entails and what examples of the final product might look like. Including visual or written instructions can help students understand exactly what is expected of them.
- **Discuss expectations for group interaction.** Working in groups can be challenging for students, and talking through your expectations for how groups should interact can help overcome many of these challenges. You may consider asking each group to create a group contract that will help guide their work and keep them on track (see an example of a group work contract template on the next page).
- **Allow students to ask extensive questions.** Even if you've already given students clear instructions for group work, they may have questions or be unfamiliar with group projects. Be sure to encourage them to ask questions about the project and your expectations for their performance.

References

Burke, A. (2011). Group work: How to use groups effectively. *Journal of Effective Teaching*, *11*(2), 87-95.

Hart Research Associates. (2013). It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success. *Liberal Education*, *99*(2).

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Group Work Contract Template

Think about what considerations are important to you in order to effectively work with others in your group by developing consensus on the categories below. Feel free to add additional categories that pertain to your work as a team.

These are the terms that we agree on as a team.

Participation: We agree to...
- *Actively participate in each group meeting.*
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Communication: We agree to...
- *Utilize Gmail as our primary means of communicating about the project.*
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Meetings: We agree to...
- *Attend all scheduled group meetings. If an emergency arises, we agree to inform all group members as soon as possible.*
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Conduct: We agree to...
- *Treat each other with respect.*
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Conflict: We agree to...
- *Discuss any conflicts with the entire group before involving other parties.*
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Deadlines: We agree to...
- *Complete all tasks 24 hours before the final project due date to allow time for review.*
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Team Member Name: _____   Team Member Signature: _____

Team Member Name: _____   Team Member Signature: _____

Team Member Name: _____   Team Member Signature: _____