

Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Planning Group Projects

Group projects offer significant learning benefits: They can stimulate critical thinking, expose students to an expanded array of perspectives on problems, and provide opportunities for students to work on projects too large for them to tackle individually. Through group projects students develop collaboration skills, both learning from and contributing to the expertise and insights of others.

Key factors in planning group projects effectively include helping students develop and maintain a sense of being a team, designing a project that requires students to collaborate, designing ways to keep students individually accountable within the group, and developing policies for troubleshooting in cases where group conflicts arise.

GROUP PROJECTS WORK BEST WHEN STUDENTS APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF TEAM WORK AND DEVELOP A SENSE OF THEMSELVES AS A TEAM.

- Communicate to students the importance of the team work in achieving course learning goals.
- Take time for team-building activities and discussion of what makes learning teams effective.
- Consider asking members to choose roles, such as facilitator, note-taker, or time-keeper, etc.
- Set aside time in class for group work; consider sitting in on groups yourself to model and encourage collaboration.
- Give members an opportunity to reflect on the quality of their contributions to the team – for example, through a short reflective writing assignment.

GROUP PROJECTS WORK BEST WHEN ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRE STUDENTS TO BE INTERDEPENDENT.

- Consider the formation of student groups: How can students best be grouped to maximize student learning?
- Design the group project around a problem that is open-ended and requires some evaluation and decision-making. Make it complex enough so that students need each other's expertise to complete it.
- Design ways to periodically track group members' awareness of the project as a whole, such as writing assignments that ask each member to describe progress or informal reporting out by one or more group members.
- Each group member should be responsible for at least one facet of the final project. Design the final project so that students must integrate their work rather than piece together individual contributions.
- Include as part of grading criteria the degree to which project components are well-integrated.

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GROUP PROJECTS WORK BEST WHEN INDIVIDUALS ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GROUP.

- Consider asking students to develop a group “charter” at the beginning of the quarter which outlines member responsibilities and group norms.
- Devise a system for students to be accountable to one another. Possibilities include asking students to submit ratings of each other’s participation or having students periodically rate their own contributions.
- Give students individual feedback on the quality of their contributions to the group.
- Consider whether some portion of the project grade should be based on individual contributions.

GROUP PROJECTS WORK BEST WHEN YOU ANTICIPATE POTENTIAL ISSUES AND ARE PREPARED TO ADDRESS THEM.

- Divide projects into segments and develop a timeline for completing each segment. Monitor group progress throughout the project.
- Regularly collect student feedback on how effectively groups are working, and work with students to address issues that arise.
- Review with students your earlier discussions of how to learn effectively in groups.

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you plan, implement, and assess the use of group projects in your classes. Call or e-mail to arrange an appointment with a CIDR consultant.



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CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to cidr@u.washington.edu, or visit our web site:

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