

## Teaching Tip 6: Scaffolding Student Group Work

S. Benson Eii-Consulting, LLC

This tip addresses the student group project theme. One danger in assigning student group projects is that some student groups, for a variety of reasons, put off working on the project until it is nearly due. Almost inevitably this results in a poorer quality project, which is more difficult to grade and disappointing for both the instructor and the students. A second issue is helping to reduce the occurrence or the impact of freeloaders, e.g. students who do not contribute their fair share.

### **Require a Work Plan**

Two techniques to help ensure that students work in a timely fashion on their project is to require a project workplan and to devote one or two class periods where student groups can work on their project. When assigning the student group project require that each group provide a work plan with a timeline and indicates their schedule for completing the project and which members of the group are responsible for which items. For example,



if the project is due in four weeks than request their work plan before the halfway point. Students must submit the work plan by the due date. Award a small number of points, generally less than 10% of the total project points, to all members if the work plan is handed in on time and is reasonable. The work plan helps to identify groups that may have problems or are heading down a wrong track. About a week before the project is due it is good to take a whole class period where student groups meet during class time and work on their project, they must do it in the classroom This serves two purposes, you don't have to prep for that class period, but more importantly it allows the teacher to meet with each group for a few minutes to find out where they are, if there are any problems and allows one to determine which groups are on track, which groups may need some help, and to head off any potential problems.

### **Peer Evaluation**

To help ensure that all group members contribute, allocate 10 to 15% of the group projects for peer evaluation. This can be done very simply, each member the class receives an anonymous peer evaluation form (see below) which they must fill out and turn into the instructor in hard copy. This is done individually, and the results are not shared with the other members of the group. It is useful to collect the peer evaluation forms when the class project is handed in. On the form each member evaluates all members of the group including themselves and distributes a fixed number of points among the members. Since there is a fixed number of points if one student gets more than some other student must get less. One may want to provide space for comment, this is optional, and students do not need to comment on their

assigned scores. Past experience shows that nearly all students fairly evaluate their peers and distribute the points in a fair fashion. For groups where one or more students did not contribute it becomes very apparent when the other members rate specific individual low. In general, one student within the group will get slightly more points if they took on a leadership role or their contributions were greater. The peer evaluation points help to remind students that they need to contribute. A higher stakes variation on this that has been used by some of instructors, is that the peer evaluation distribution is converted to a percentage and that percentage is used to adjust the final project grade for each student. A peer review template is provided below<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Peer Review Form (PDF)



EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONSULTING, LLC

---

Prof. Spencer A. Benson | [sbenson@eii-consulting.com](mailto:sbenson@eii-consulting.com), [sbenson51@gmail.com](mailto:sbenson51@gmail.com)

