4th Annual Celebration of Teaching Excellence at Cornell: January 2014

Group Work: How To Create and Manage Student Groups

This Session will:
- Consider when and why to use formal group assignments.
- Explore how to design effective group assignments.
- Discuss how to assign students to formal groups.
- Identify approaches to promote positive group work.

Thinking about a formal group assignment in your class:
What student learning outcomes does this assignment contribute to?

What do you need to share with your students about your goals and expectations for this assignment? How do you want your students to approach this assignment?

How can you build positive interdependence while retaining individual accountability in your groups?

What selection criteria would you like to use to set up your groups?

What new group work strategy would you like to adopt in your class?
Group Work Case Study

Four members of a group approach you, complaining that their fifth member has missed every meeting despite promising that he will be there, that he hasn’t responded to multiple email and phone messages, and that he consistently turns in incomplete or incorrect work if he turns in anything at all. The group has turned in A level work up to this point with no indication of a problem. The four group members seem angry and agitated, admitting that they stopped giving the fifth group member assignments long ago for fear that they would miss an assignment deadline. When confronted, the fifth member seems hurt and confused, claiming that he didn’t understand what his group expected of him. Even more frustrating to the rest of the group is that this group member presents his case sincerely and convincingly to you, without looking guilty at all.

What do you think is going on in this group?

How might you respond to the students?

How might you mitigate some of those challenges before they happen?