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# Team Learning and Group Projects for Today's Students

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Issues in Teaching Team Projects

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# Why Use Team Projects?

- Development of team work skills and modeling of real world work processes
- Encourages 'deep' learning and student centered learning
- Allows students to better address Problem Based Learning (PBL)
- Increased productivity when groups work well
- Ability to tackle larger, more complex projects

# Problems With Team Projects

- Social loafers or Free Loaders (slackers)
- Process Losses (loss of productivity due to time spent on group dynamics)
- Intra-group Conflicts
- Social Isolates
- Outside Pressures (too much to do in too little time)
- Group Grades

# Faculty Responsibilities 1

**Determining** when it is appropriate to use group assignments

- What is the goal? – if it is the acquisition of individual skills or knowledge then team projects are not appropriate
- What is the intent?
  - Co-operative or Collaborative?
  - Divisible or Indivisible
  - Process or Product oriented

# Faculty Responsibilities 2

## Forming

- Group Selection
  - By topic
  - By Learning Style
  - By Personality Profile
  - Self Selection
  - Faculty Determined
  - Random
  - Combination

# Faculty Responsibilities 3

## Educating

- Information about normal group processes
  - Forming
  - Storming
  - Norming
  - Performing (Tuckman 1965)
- Instruction/Training on group process

# Faculty Responsibilities 4

## Modeling and Practice

- Allow practice of group skills prior to performance groups (eg. Conflict resolution, communication skills, constructive criticism, minute taking etc.)
- Model skills in the classroom – illustrate techniques, use processes in teaching, describe team research processes

# Faculty Responsibilities 5

## Monitoring and Intervening

- Group Reports
- Group Meetings
- Ombudspeople or Liaisons
- Written Feedback
- Early Intervention

Expect Conflict, but Control Destructive Conflict



# Faculty Responsibilities 6

## Assessing

- Group grades – elicit feedback from group members on contributions
- Ensure each course has individual performance grading in addition to teamwork
- Determine the individual contributions to the group product
- Grade the process as well as the product

# Conclusions?

- Not a time saver in terms of course hours
  - time saved in marking is more than spent in set-up, monitoring, controlling and assessing the group effort
- Requires more effort than 'talking head' lectures
- Greater potential for disasters

# BUT.....

- Students learn better (deep vs surface learning)
- Students can examine more complex issues
- Students develop important skills
- Group projects reflect 'real world' working conditions

Faculty find group projects interesting and challenging too!