**Pod F: Supporting Equitable Student Group Work**

**Instructions:** As a first step, it is important to evaluate the use of group work and make sure that it is serving a pedagogical purpose. Which of your learning outcomes depend on collaboration? Which can be achieved through individual work?  
Take 5 minutes now to consider the role of group work in your learning outcomes.

1. How does group work support your course-wide learning outcomes?
2. How does group work support the learning outcomes for specific assignments?

# Forming Groups

For those learning outcomes that depend on collaboration, here are some best practices. These will vary based on the scale of the group work: some groups may function only briefly, during a single exercise in a single class period. Others may have longer tenure; these require more forethought and intentional formation. Group work and collaboration are real-world skills that students will need to successfully navigate their academic and professional lives, especially when working with people or groups who are different from themselves.

## Short-term groups

* Assign groups randomly and rotate throughout the semester. Zoom allows you to form breakout rooms randomly.
* Assign and rotate simple roles. Make explicit what the responsibilities of each role are.
* Consider the demographic make-up of groups. For example, don’t always put marginalized students in different groups and force them to serve as cultural ambassadors, but also don’t always group racial/ethnic minorities together. Grouping students around skills and interests, rather than aspects of identity, can be helpful. A new feature in Zoom allows participants to self-selected breakout rooms, which could be labeled by topic or interest.

## Long-term groups

* Administer a strengths assessment and form groups with diverse skill sets (see Blowers resource). Be explicit about why you are doing this and how you will use it.
* Devote class time to establishing norms for group function. [tps://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/the-real-world-guide-to-team-norms/](https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/the-real-world-guide-to-team-norms/)
* Give students time in class to develop a meeting plan. Consider asking them to submit these plans to you for accountability.
* Consider flexibility for students with diverse demands on their time, like veterans, students with autism or neuro-divergences, those working part or full time, parents, and other caregivers. Ask student groups to schedule meetings well in advance so that those with competing demands can plan ahead.
* Give students opportunities for offering feedback, both to you and to their group, about how the group is functioning. Model how to give constructive feedback to help collaborative groups be successful.

## Assigning Roles

Assigning students particular roles can be an effective way to structure group work. Sometimes certain students assume too much responsibility for a group’s work, while other students may be reluctant to contribute to the group’s activities. Assigning roles helps to distribute responsibility among group members and ensures accountability for all students’ participation. As students practice different roles, they have the opportunity to develop a variety of skills.

**Determine roles need for group work:** Think of an activity or assignment during which your students typically work in groups. This may be a short-term, in-class discussion or an end-of-semester project.

* **Write:** What roles have students tended to play when roles are not assigned?
* **Write:** What roles are needed for the activity to be successful? Some examples include facilitator, recorder, presenter, writer, timekeeper, and artist. These may or may not have arisen naturally in your groups in the past.
* **Compare** the responses in your previous two sections. How well do they align? How might assigning roles make group work more equitable? How might it serve the pedagogical goals of the assignment?

## Provide students with expectations for roles

When you first introduce roles, provide clear instructions for the responsibilities that come with each assignment. You might want to make lists of what it looks like when the role is performed well and when it is not performed well. Consider using HighTest5.com.

**Roles:** List the roles that are needed to successfully complete your assigned group work. If you have used roles in the past, include these. If not, think about the roles that spontaneously arise in the most effective and dynamic groups. Are different or additional roles required in a remote format? Can you enumerate and describe these to help students step into the work?

**Skills:** Annotate your list of roles above with the skills needed to perform each role you plan on assigning.

**Write:** What simple questions could you use in a survey to determine students' perceptions of their own strengths and needs? How could you ensure that students are able to gain the necessary skills if they want to choose a “stretch” role? Are certain roles more challenging than others?

## Debrief and evaluate group function

In writing or through a discussion, ask students to reflect on their experiences working in groups. Which roles do they feel most comfortable in? Which are most challenging for them? Students may also have ideas about new roles that should be assigned, especially given a remote learning environments.

**Reflect:** What questions/feedback can you request from students on their group-work experiences? What other questions would help you form more effective groups in the future? How can you incorporate students’ ideas into your lesson plans?  List at least three questions you would ask students about how their groups functioned.

Resources: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/assigning-roles-group-work>