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FORMING GROUPS FOR GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

You have your group assignment or assignments set up for the semester. You are all excited about using groups in your class. You know your students will resist because we all know that students hate to work in groups. How many times have you heard that statement? However, you are convinced that your assignments will garner the full support of the students. Okay. So, let's see some ways that you can prepare the students for group work and make your group assignments successful.

Begin by changing the name from groups to teams. Most people are more comfortable with the word team than group. Team connotes community and connection. Group connotes for some people a more negative approach to working with others.

Form the teams before the first day of class. Since you have the class roster before the first day of class, you can begin to form the teams. You may want to consider forming the teams so that each team is diverse according to major, gender, or language. The idea is to have the students sit with people other than their friends or people whom they know from other classes.

For those of you uncomfortable with pre-arranging teams, you can do so randomly on the first day of class. There are several ways to select students randomly.

Whatever method you choose, the idea is to have the students be comfortable with each other before beginning any team assignment, whether regularly for in-class assignments or for the one main team project at the end of the semester.

Once the teams are formed, have the students introduce themselves to each other with any type of icebreaker. Again, you are setting the stage for the students to be comfortable with each other so that they can work effectively as a team.

Now, you are probably saying to yourself, "All of this work just to accomplish one group assignment?" Good point. As with everything in life (and teaching is a part of life), the more preparation, the better the outcome. So, no matter how simple the team or in-class team assignment, the better the outcome of the assignment if the students are more comfortable working with each other on a regular basis.

If you plan on creating one team assignment, scaffold the process by having students work in teams on a simple in-class assignment. The assignment may be a portion of the final team assignment. Students need to work with each other on a consistent basis before tackling the final team project. You may want to assign an in-class team assignment once or twice a month before the final team project, and these assignments should be very simple.

For those of you who ask students to critique their work with their peers, you can assign them to work with a partner within the team and then share out with the team. The students will be more engaged when they know their peers whom they see **and interact with on a regular basis**.

Set the stage for successful team projects and assignments by forming teams early and providing several in-class opportunities for the students to work with their teams. In this setting, you will also learn of any problems that the teams are experiencing early in the semester and avoid the end-of-semester project complaints from team

members that a student in the team is not working effectively.

Now, that enthusiasm for that perfect team assignment you created will be heightened when you form and work with the teams early in the semester.

For more ideas and feedback on working in teams, you can join us at our monthly meetings of the Focus Group on Incorporating Group Assignments in the Classroom. We will meet again in September.



BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Sandy Figueroa is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Office Technology Unit in the Business Department at Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College since 1979. She also teaches as an adjunct faculty member in the Business Department of the School of Professional Studies. Professor Figueroa serves on a number of committees at Hostos. She received both her bachelor's degree and master's degree in Business Education from Hunter College. Prior to teaching at Hostos Community College, Professor Figueroa taught in high school for seven years and was the business department chairperson at St. Gabriel High School in New Rochelle for three years.

HOSTOS READS



Hostos Reads 2018-19: A Year of Thinking in Community by Lisa Tappeiner and Silvia Reyes

During the 2018-2019 academic year, faculty and staff from a broad range of disciplines and programs gathered to discuss the Hostos Reads! selection, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* by Alan Jacobs. Jacobs believes that while our thinking often gets us into trouble, we can change the way we think for the better by avoiding pitfalls such as believing we can think independently, and replacing thought with popular catchphrases and keywords. But can we put these ideas into practice in our classrooms?

Discussions centered around ways to use the book in teaching and working with students. A helpful summary from the CBC radio (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) distills Jacobs' arguments to five steps that are closely related to teaching and learning:

1. Just wait five minutes – many classroom activities such as think-pair-share and free writing operate on the principle that your thinking will be clearer and response will be better after pausing a few minutes to reflect.
2. Amplify constructive voices – this relates to how we facilitate discussion or which texts we assign to students; considering solutions is part of learning about problems.
3. Let go of the idea that you need to think for yourself – when we ask students to work in groups, we do it because good ideas arise from discussion and sharing knowledge.
4. Stop comparing conversation to warfare – how do we mediate conflict and differences of opinion in our classrooms?
5. Be fair to opposing views – how do we represent ideas in our classrooms we don't agree with? How do we educate in a context where scientific consensus is being called into question?