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# Teaching With Collaborative Group Work



## Technology-Enhanced Collaborative Group Work Award

Group activities are used by many instructors on campus. Group collaboration fosters consensus-building and task management skills and allows people with different backgrounds and levels of experience an opportunity to come together to create something that is greater than each member could achieve alone. While instructors understand the value collaborative activities bring to learning, students can find these projects to be painful and frustrating. Meeting outside of class, delegating tasks, defining roles, and dealing with group dynamics are obstacles that students mention most. Instructors also find it difficult to know how to assess group activities in ways that measure both the outcome and the process. Additionally, while there are many technologies that can be used to foster collaboration, instructors find it challenging to select the right technology and understand how it can be used in an effective manner.

Engage implemented the ***Engage Adaptation Technology-Enhanced Collaborative Group Work Award*** during the 2008-2009 academic year to study the impact and processes around student collaboration both in and out of the classroom. Forty faculty and instructional staff from schools and colleges across the campus participated in the award. Award participants worked with learning technology consultants from across campus to design, facilitate, grade, and assess effective collaborative group activities. Award projects centered on five types of collaborative activities

- collaborative writing;
- student critiques;
- student reflections;
- group presentations; and
- group problem-solving.

To learn more about the ***Engage Adaptation Technology-Enhanced Collaborative Group Work Award***, or to download the full version of the ***Teaching With Collaborative Group Work*** publication, go to:

<http://engage.doit.wisc.edu/collaborate>

## Why Collaborate?

Collaboration is common in the workplace. Many businesses and work teams are faced with ill-defined challenges that require creative and innovative solutions. These types of challenges call for groups of people with a range of expertise to share and create new knowledge while working together toward a solution. However, collaboration does not come naturally, and educators are being challenged to prepare students to collaborate and provide opportunities that highlight the value of collaboration as a tool that helps them think in new ways and become creative, effective problem-solvers.

In ***Strategies for Energizing Large Classes: From Small Groups to Learning Communities***, more than 100 faculty using small group activities or working to create student communities in large classes were interviewed on their rationale for using collaborative work in the classroom (MacGregor, Cooper, Smith, Robinson, 2000). Their reasons included:

- promoting cognitive elaboration;
- enhancing critical thinking;
- providing feedback;
- promoting social and emotional development;
- appreciating diversity; and
- reducing student attrition.

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# Methods of Good Practice

Research shows that the manner in which an instructor implements and facilitates a group project has a significant impact on the success of the group project. The **Engage Adaptation Technology-Enhanced Collaborative Group Work Award** combined collaborative technologies and research-based facilitation strategies with the goal of improving the experience students and instructors had with collaborative group work.

The list of suggestions below, resulting from the instructor and student surveys, provide methods of good practice for instructors planning to experiment with collaborative group projects. The results of the award program, in conjunction with the literature on group work, provide evidence of how task design, group process facilitation, and technology choice influence the success of the group project.

## Ensure the task is worthy of collaborative group work

- Consider the pedagogical challenge.
- Determine whether group work adds value to the task.
- Specify how the group project aligns with the learning objectives of the course.

## Design the task carefully

- Identify the types of interactions desired (student-student, student-instructor, student-content).
- Identify the tasks students will need to complete.

- Identify the barriers students might face and/ or where they have struggled in the past.
- Choose technology that aligns with the interactions, tasks, and challenges.

## Prepare students for collaboration

- Communicate the rationale for group work including why the challenge is worthy of collaborative group work and how the group project relates to course objectives.
- Help students understand what makes good collaboration.
- Provide students tools to deal with team dynamics.
- Provide students training on the technologies identified for the assignment.

## Perform regular assessments of process and product

- Use milestones or check-ins to ensure groups are on the right track.
- Provide students the opportunity to evaluate their group members' contributions to the project.
- Grade the collaborative process used as well as the results of the collaboration.
- Include group and individual performance in the final grade.

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# Getting Started

Before integrating collaborative group work into the classroom, instructors are encouraged to meet with a learning technology consultant. Consultants will help instructors:

- define the learning goals of the assignment;
- identify appropriate software and hardware solutions;
- identify training and support resources; and
- develop a grading rubric.

DoIT Academic Technology consultants are available to discuss plans to implement collaborative group work in the classroom. DoIT Academic Technology staff can be reached at:

**email:** [academictech@doit.wisc.edu](mailto:academictech@doit.wisc.edu)

**phone:** (608) 262-5667

Consulting support may be available through an instructor's school or department. DoIT Academic Technology will refer instructors to departmental support solutions as available.



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