

GROUP PROJECTS IN FIRST-YEAR GENERAL EDUCATION
COLLEGE COURSES: A GUIDEBOOK FOR INSTRUCTORS

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Karlie M. Garcia

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ABSTRACT

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First-year college students learn a variety of skills when integrating into the college world. While adjusting to living on their own, transitioning to college course loads, and beginning to embark on taking general education courses, first-year college students are learning every day. Group projects are a prominent activity enforced in first-year courses. Therefore, instructors of first-year general education courses should provide a meaningful experience for students, so their fresh minds can be shaped in the most beneficial way. For example, a multitude of transferable skills are learned through group projects, including communication, working with others, and time-management, to name a few.

While there is research regarding the importance of general education courses for students in college, the benefits of group projects, instructor roles in group projects, and attitudes about group projects, there is less specific research on the value of group projects and specific guidelines for instructors of first-year students in general education courses who are

administering group projects. Therefore, this project explores an original acronym, “DETAIL,” which stands for deadlines, evaluations, team-building, assign individual tasks, instructor duties, and learning value. This acronym will aid instructors to provide meaningful group project experiences.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

First-year college students learn a particular set of skills upon entering college. There are a multitude of life skills, academic skills, and social skills that this population develops over the first year of college. Therefore, at this critical time, it is important for educators to guide students to find value in their learning. Over the course of the first year in college, students will begin taking general education courses. Passing these courses is required by the university as a condition for graduation (Warner & Koeppel, 2009). As students take these courses, they should develop certain skills that will help them in their lives beyond college. Some skills include critical thinking strategies, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and written and oral communication skills (Glenn, 2009; Most & Wellmon, 2015; Warner & Koeppel, 2009). Among these skills, employers agree, skills involving collaboration are of utmost importance for the workforce (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001). Research indicates that group projects have a significant impact on developing first-year students' skill sets. Group projects can increase students' abilities to work with others, develop a depth of knowledge, have support from peers, and gain new perspectives (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009). The following section briefly discusses the benefits of group projects, implications for instructors regarding group projects, and general education's purpose and perceptions.

Group Projects

There are many advantages to promoting group work in the classroom. In higher education, group work is thought to prepare students for the work force, and employers expect students to be prepared in how to effectively collaborate with others (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001). When collaborating, individuals practice skills that are valuable to the workforce. For example, some skills include working with diverse perspectives, learning civic values, and engaging with others' perspectives and views by participating in deep conversations and thinking. Group projects also foster becoming proficient in social and interpersonal communication skills, time-management skills and sharing the workload (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers, 2009; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Tarricone & Luca, 2002).

Learning to work collaboratively with others allows individuals to practice communicating with different populations. It gives them the opportunity to have seminar-like conversations that can open new perspectives and views on topics that one may have been close-minded about. In addition, this allows students the opportunity to share skills. For example, each individual of a group has different strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is important to use communication in the group to capitalize on strengths of the individuals in the group in order to produce the best project possible (Hall & Buzwell, 2013).

Studies suggest that groups should be created by the professor, in sizes no larger than four individuals per group (Helms & Haynes, 1990). In addition, these professors should use a non-randomized method to select individuals of a group (Hansen, 2006). This means that when groups are formed by the instructor, their composition should depend upon personality types, work ethics, and skill levels. When groups are formed with this method,

students are more likely to have a positive learning experience, and they will become accustomed to a group formation process that more closely matches that of the workplace, where supervisors place workers in teams based on skill sets (Hernandez, 2002). Moreover, once groups have been selected, instructors should emphasize the importance of teamwork and place a value on group assignments. Students may not always realize the significance of working collaboratively; hence, instructors should present group projects in an exciting way, emphasizing the value that this experience will add to their skill sets (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010).

Moreover, instructors should motivate students to understand the value of group projects by purposefully teaching them skills to use when working in groups. For example, instructors may help students improve their social skills through oral or written instruction, and have students practice social skills in a team-building exercise before beginning to work in their instructor-assigned groups (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). This preparation may help students feel as though they are gaining more from a group project than they realize by foreshadowing personal skill objectives they will master over the course of the project. Better preparation will help students work more collaboratively, which in turn, will help them in their future careers (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson 2015).

General Education

According to Zeszotarski (1999), the purpose of general education is to ensure students are familiar with core knowledge as well as basic skills, thus allowing them to increase their abilities to access, manipulate, and evaluate information and sources. It is also important for general education to address a breadth of knowledge, enhance skills in computation, written expression, critical thinking, and help students acquire knowledge that

will help them make decisions in their everyday lives (Zeszotarski, 1999). General education courses should also emphasize teamwork skills in diverse groups, written and oral communication, and teach a habit of gathering and weighing evidence before forming a conclusion (Glenn, 2009). These skills are important because students may not receive the opportunity in certain major courses to develop and practice these lifelong learning skills. Additionally, Zeszotarski (1999), emphasized the importance of teaching multicultural studies to help students understand a larger community and become aware of different perspectives and cultural and ethnic differences. Another recommendation to incorporate into the general education curriculum would be computer literacy to help students learn the tools to prepare them for the technological advancements in this day and age (Zeszotarski, 1999).

In looking at student knowledge and perceptions of general education curriculum, one study revealed that students had misconceptions about general education requirements and should be better informed about the relevance of general education courses (Thompson, Eodice & Tran, 2015). Since general education curriculum contributes to intellectual development for college students, it is important to consider the student's perception of general education requirements. Thompson et al. (2015) discovered that 80% of 900 students surveyed were first-year students who did not know the basic facts about the requirements of general education. These data uncover an issue because if students do not know the requirements of general education, then they are even more unlikely to know the value their general education courses offer to their knowledge and skill sets.

According to Most and Wellmon (2015), curriculum is the design of what and how instructors share what is worth knowing, conserving, defending and stewarding to students that helps shape intellectual and moral habits and imaginations, which should be

done in a dynamic and collaborative way. The curriculum and design methods instructors use have a significant effect on student perceptions. Thompson et al. (2015) discovered a correlation between instructor attitudes and student perceptions about general education. For example, instructors were found to play a large role in getting students to understand the purpose of general education courses, and if they expressed a lack of interest in teaching the general education courses, the students received signals that the course was not important (Thompson et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for instructors to demonstrate enthusiasm and express the value that general education courses can provide students. General education courses help develop skills students need to help make contributions to society.

One research report focused on examining the current general education curriculum structure at a large institution where the general education curriculum was redesigned to meet student needs (Cottrell et al., 2015). This report discovered through questionnaires to campus advisors and instructors that best practices for marketing general education curriculum to students included communicating a consistent message about its benefit to student learning (Cottrell et al., 2015). In communicating general education benefits to students, advisors can improve their relationship with students when meeting and discussing course offerings and selections, as well as aid students in choosing general education courses that interest them by integrating courses that both count toward their majors and offer general education credit and skills.

According to Cottrell et al. (2015), general education curriculum provides benefits to undergraduate students who are exploring their academic potential for the first time as adults, and over the past few decades, universities have struggled with the perceived role of the general education curriculum and how to best impact the students through curriculum.

General education curriculum should focus on teaching students the skills needed to succeed in the workplace, including the ability to interact with people from other cultures, understand different perspectives, and contribute to society. All of these skills can be supported with carefully executed group projects (Cottrell et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, general education curriculum values student skills, knowledge, and career preparation. It is important to consider emphasizing the value of general education course requirements from the university and the faculty and how these courses relate to students' potential careers. This emphasis may motivate students to engage in general education courses and gain meaningful knowledge and skills from them. Hence, it is also critical to incorporate group projects into the general education curriculum to promote collaborative learning and communication skills, all of which are important to employers in the scheme of the workforce.

Scope of the Project

The project contains content to support instructors of first-year general education college students in facilitating the most meaningful and positive group experiences for students in their classes. The project is organized in a structured format following the chosen acronym, based on research. The original acronym is DETAIL, which stands for deadlines, evaluations, team-building, assign individual tasks, instructor duties, and learning value.

The project will be used to help guide instructors before introducing group work to students to help them structure and frame the group work in a meaningful and effective manner that will cause the least amount of frustrations. The goal is to create the most positive

group work experiences for first-year students to help them learn the most transferable skills possible and make the opportunity to work in groups one that provides value to their educational and personal lives.

Significance

The significance of this research is to create a tool for instructors to utilize to help best prepare students to engage in group projects during their first-year in general education courses. When students fully participate in their work, it allows for the opportunity for more connections to be made. In addition, if students are focused and doing their part in a group project, they may find greater value in working in a team environment. It is valuable for students to learn skills from group projects because employers are seeking graduates who have the skills to collaborate effectively with others. Therefore, when instructors emphasize the value of these assignments by explicitly supporting and facilitating positive experiences, students will benefit more from the group work process.

By recognizing student and instructor perceptions of the value of group projects, the outcomes should foster adaptations in the curriculum that will allow for the most positive and beneficial experience for first-year students taking general education courses that require group projects. Therefore, the guide to group projects for instructors of first-year general education college students provides support for engaging and effective group work.

Definitions of Terms

Throughout the study, there are a few terms which are addressed. For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be defined using these definitions. The term “general education” will refer to college courses within a university that all students must pass as a

requirement for graduation. The term “group project” will refer to an assignment which requires students to work on a project collaboratively across multiple class periods, with some work occurring outside of normal class meeting times. The term “free-rider” will be defined as a behavior pattern where an individual working in a group setting fails to contribute their share, which in turn, negatively impacts the group. Finally, the term “general education curriculum” will refer to academic content that contains core knowledge based on the institution’s mission and values.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

First-year college students learn a particular set of skills upon entering college. There are a multitude of life skills, academic skills, and social skills this population develops over the first year of college. Therefore, it is important for educators to guide students to find value in their learning during this critical time. Over the course of the first year in college, students will begin taking general education courses. As a condition for graduation, the university requires that they pass (Warner & Koeppel, 2009). As students take these courses, they should develop certain skills that will help them in their lives beyond college. Some skills include critical thinking strategies, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and written and oral communication skills (Glenn, 2009; Most & Wellmon, 2015; Warner & Koeppel, 2009). Among these skills, employers agree, skills involving collaboration are of utmost importance for the workforce (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001). Research indicates that group projects have a significant impact on developing first-year students' skill sets. Group projects can increase student's abilities to work with others, develop a depth of knowledge, have support from peers, and gain new perspectives (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009). The following section briefly discusses the benefits of group projects, implications for instructors regarding group projects, and general education's purpose and perceptions.

Group Projects

Introduction

Group projects are widely used among higher education for many reasons. There are a myriad of benefits to incorporating group projects into the curriculum. However, there are also drawbacks to promoting group projects. As educators, there is a duty to prepare students for the rigors of their later careers, and in many occasions, employers have revealed that possessing the skill to work collaboratively with others is critical (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001).

Group work, as defined as an assignment requiring students to work collaboratively across multiple class periods, also involving time outside of normal class meeting times, is suggested to lead to skill attainment (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015). Some benefits include the ability to work with others, developing a depth of knowledge, having support from peers, and gaining new perspectives (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009). However, working in groups also has drawbacks, including working with unmotivated peers, the problem of free-riders, differing personality types, receiving the same grade as peers, and time management (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009; Swaray, 2012).

Aside from all the benefits and drawbacks, instructors should be conscious of decisions they make when introducing, maintaining, and evaluating these group projects (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015). It is up to the instructor to develop a design that meets the needs of the students and will allow for clear expectations and organized facilitation of the group project (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Group project benefits, drawbacks, and the instructor's role are all essential to consider when examining group work in higher education.

Benefits of Group Projects

There are many advantages to promoting group work in the classroom. In higher education, group work is thought to prepare students for the work force and employers expect students to be prepared in how to effectively collaborate with others (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001). When collaborating, individuals practice skills that are valuable to the workforce. For example, some skills include working with diverse perspectives, learning civic values, and participating in deeper thinking and deeper conversations through engaging with others' perspectives and views. Group projects also foster becoming proficient in social and interpersonal communication skills, time-management skills and sharing the workload (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers, 2009; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Tarricone & Luca, 2002).

Learning to work collaboratively with others allows individuals to practice communicating with diverse populations. It gives them the opportunity to have seminar-like conversations that can open new perspectives and views on topics one may have been close-minded about. In addition, these conversations allow students the opportunity to share skills. For example, each individual of a group has different strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, to produce the best project possible, it is important to use communication in the group to capitalize on strengths of the individuals (Hall & Buzwell, 2013).

Working in a group also allows students the opportunity to practice time management. This goal can be accomplished by meeting outside of class time, working around others' schedules, and completing individual work on time in order to keep the group on track (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001).

Negotiation is also a major benefit in working in the group setting. Individuals learn communication and interpersonal skills when sharing views or ideas about the concepts or design of their project (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Practicing these interpersonal skills helps prepare students for the real world, where they will need to communicate effectively with others and get their ideas across in a meaningful and polite way.

Not only do group projects benefit the students, but they benefit the instructors. Grouping students together, promoting supportive collaboration between students, and enforcing peer evaluations throughout the process may take some of the grading workload off of the instructor (Swaray, 2012). If students are working together, the instructor may become more of a facilitator. When the instructor's role is more of a facilitator, the instructor is better able to provide guidance with group conflict. This guidance can be especially beneficial for introductory students to learn the skills necessary for working collaboratively (Bailey, Barber & Ferguson, 2015).

Drawbacks to Group Projects

There are quite a few disadvantages for students when working in groups. The concept of a group project may initially trigger frustration in students. Moreover, students may be concerned about the challenge of individual schedules and the prospect of meeting outside of class, receiving the same grade mark as a fellow non-contributing group member, free riding, clashing personality types, and working with unmotivated people (Bourner, Hughes & Bourner, 2001; Hall & Buzwell, 2013; Swaray, 2012).

Bourner, Hughes and Bourner (2001) used questionnaires to survey first-year college undergraduates who participated in a group project for a semester. Results indicated

that students appreciated the opportunity for teamwork and in-depth work but did not like working with unmotivated people and those who were ‘free-riders.’

Free-riding can be defined as a behavior pattern where an individual working in a group setting fails to contribute his or her fair share, and it negatively impacts the group (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). In addition, Hall and Buzwell (2013) identified voluntary and involuntary free-riders. Voluntary free-riders are those who are unreliable or unwilling to contribute to the project; involuntary free-riders are students who are “low-status” in the group and other ‘high-status’ students in the group take ownership, due to their lack of trust in a group member’s abilities (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). Both types of free riders influence a group negatively. In a study conducted by Swaray (2012), 32 students were randomly selected and assigned to four groups of five members and two groups of six members. They were assigned to a project that required one presentation per group that counted for 35% of the grade, one report per group that counted for 30% of the grade, one short answer question per group that counted for 20% of the grade, and one reflective piece per group that counted for 15% of the grade (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). The presentation from the group would have one group member randomly selected to present; after that the other group members could add onto what the original group member presented. Results indicated that students reported 87% agreed there was no noticeable free-riding problem (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). This was in part due to the stress that group members did not know who was presenting to the class, and part due to the students feeling required to know their module for the presentation, because they did not know who would have to present (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). Therefore, this model significantly reduced the free-riding problem and significantly increased the participation level of group members.

Another controversy with group projects includes different personalities. For example, Helms and Haynes (1990) identified six different “bad” group members: the aggressor (“individual who attempts to dominate the group processes”), the blocker (“individual who stifles contributions of group members”), the gatekeeper (“individual who manipulates the group by withholding key information and resources”), the recognition seeker (“individual who desires to seek credit for the majority of all the group decisions”), the whiner (“individual who resists taking part in group processes and is always complaining about the amount of time and work required”), and the do-nothing (“avoids work but does not overly create dissension by appearing to assume duties and failing to follow through”). A drawback to working in with others in groups is the possibility of having group members such as these, who hinder the group experience and cause frustration in group members.

Instructors and Practices for Group Projects

Research has identified characteristics of effective group projects. Hence, there are various responsibilities the instructor must facilitate during the group process - for example group selection, grading, and instructor attitudes toward group projects. The instructor has a role in group projects that is just as significant as the student roles. These important instructor responsibilities are outlined in the succeeding section.

Research suggests that groups should be created by the professor, in sizes no larger than four individuals per group (Helms & Haynes, 1990). In addition, these professors should use a non-randomized method to select individuals of a group (Hansen, 2006). This means that when groups are formed by the instructor, they should be formed thoughtfully, based on personality types, work ethics, and skill levels. When instructors group students intentionally, students are more likely to have a positive learning experience. This method of

forming groups more closely matches the workplace, where supervisors place workers in teams based on skill sets, rather than allowing workers to self-select groups (Hernandez, 2002). Moreover, once groups have been selected, instructors should emphasize the importance of teamwork and place a value on group assignments. There is a greater picture in working with others, and instructors should present group projects in an exciting way that emphasizes the importance and value that this experience will add to their skill sets (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010).

According to Hansen (2006), once groups are formed, it is then key to focus on team-building exercises with the students to help break down barriers and develop a team atmosphere. In doing this, group members feel more connected and can then set up group norms, goals, conflict management procedures, and task related roles for each individual member of the group (Barker & Franzak, 1997; Hansen, 2006; Helms & Haynes, 1990). In many cases, splitting up the work or alternating work in some projects by assigning each member a different role for a period of time may allow students to stay engaged in the group assignment and feel responsible for a task. According to Hansen (2006), taking turns as a team leader, gatekeeper, recorder, timekeeper, and social or emotional leader can allow for higher levels of cooperation and decrease the likelihood for free-riders to emerge in the group setting.

To extend this idea of keeping students on task, instructors should also foster individual accountability through weekly check-ins, team interim reports, or peer evaluations throughout the group project process (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015; Hansen, 2006). Assigning weekly check-ins may also reduce the free-rider problem. Hansen (2006) asserts that it is important to provide feedback from instructors or peers during this process.

Feedback allows students to make alterations in their work, attitudes toward the project, and quality of participation. Checking in also holds the students accountable for their work.

Further, Slavin (2014) shared that group members should all be held responsible for learning problem solving skills, such as how to be an active listener. Active listening includes allowing others to speak without interrupting, engaging in conversations with those who speak up, and encouraging teammates. In fostering these practices along with accountability, instructors can promote students to be accountable in their project, while practicing collaboration and problem-solving skills.

Murray (2017), demonstrated that accountability is essential in increasing performance in a group project through establishing a non-compliance policy, such as a protocol to enforce if a group member is not doing their work, as well as captainships, which assigns each member with a specific title and duty (i.e. a team manager, leader, scheduler, gatekeeper, social or emotional leader, etc.).

Furthermore, when students actually participate in group projects, it improves the experience for the entire group. For example, in a study where student perceptions were measured based on satisfaction of group experiences, researchers found that student's perceptions were shaped by both group processes and the instructor's contributions to facilitating, engaging, and being accessible to the students (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015). Therefore, it is up to the instructors to facilitate engagement in group projects by using a design structure that encourages individual participation in group projects.

In fact, according to a study by Bailey, Barber, and Ferguson (2015), an increase in student perceptions about the group project indicated a higher willingness to engage in collaborative work. As a result students' collaborative and experiential learning goals were of

higher quality. Some students however, may think that working collaboratively is detrimental to their grades.

Contrary to this belief, Lavy (2016), examined students with attachment anxiety and avoidance anxiety and studied how that affected the actual work-group functioning. Researchers found that while those with attachment anxiety had poorer satisfaction with working in a group, and those with attachment avoidance perceived they would perform worse when working in a group, both groups actually experienced an increase in their grades after working in the group tasks. Therefore, those with attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety felt less satisfied with the experiences, but did very well in the group tasks. This tells instructors to also take into account that there is a potential discrepancy in students' perceptions about group work functioning and their actual functioning.

While it is important to assess student perspectives in group work, it is equally important to pay attention to actual academic achievement that occurs with incorporating group projects. As a result, instructors should provide adequate feedback about individual student growth to students to allow them realize accomplishments they made over the process of working collaboratively (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010).

Feedback to groups can be given in by the instructor or peers. Sun, Harris, Walther and Baiocchi (2015), the researchers discussed how feedback is very important to student learning, but can be difficult in large classes, thus peer assessments are a useful method to provide students with feedback. The researchers conducted an online educational platform with an in-class, matched-set, randomized crossover experiment. This experiment concluded that peer assessment causes a small, but significant improvement in student achievement. A major takeaway from the study is that peer assessment saves an instructor

time, while also benefiting the students by providing them with a form of feedback. The students in this study who peer assessed one another actually did better on unit quizzes than those who did not participate. This finding shows educators that students learn from peers and enhance their knowledge in the process, while saving the instructor time.

Moreover, Labeouf, Griffith, and Roberts (2016), discovered that allocation of grades was a significant issue in perceptions of group work for the 811 (118 faculty and 693 students) participants surveyed from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Surveys were administered that asked a series of questions regarding individual faculty and student experiences with group work in all Embry-Riddle modalities. These surveys concluded that faculty and students found difficulty in evaluating individual student contributions for grades. The study concluded that both faculty and students have different perceptions on group work even over the same issues. For example, faculty perceived that grades for group members accurately reflected individual student performance, but students perceived that all members received the same grade, regardless of individual contributions. This demonstrated a mismatch in perceptions between the two populations. Therefore, instructors may need to adjust their instruction or set more boundaries in the grading policy and procedures when administering group work.

Moreover, instructors should motivate students to understand the value of group projects by purposefully teaching them skills to use when working in groups. For example, instructors may help students improve their social skills through oral or written instruction, and have students practice these skills in a team building exercise before beginning to work in their instructor-assigned groups (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Participating in these team building exercises may help students feel as though they are gaining more from a group

project than they realize by foreshadowing the personal skill objectives that they will master over the course of the project. These interactions among peers will better prepare students to work in groups, which as a result, will help students work more collaboratively, which in turn, will help them in their future careers (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson 2015).

Conclusion

Group projects are an important component in the higher education system. In fact, there are many benefits to incorporating group projects into the curriculum. For example, students learn to work with others, improve their communication and interpersonal skills, and gain new perspectives (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009). Although there are benefits, there are a few drawbacks. These include working with unmotivated peers, the problem of free-riders, differing personality types, receiving the same grade as peers, and time management (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009; Swaray, 2012). Despite the stated benefits and drawbacks, instructors must take it upon themselves to help facilitate positive group experiences for students. For example, instructors should develop a design that meets the needs of the students and allows for clear expectations and organized facilitation of the group project (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). In doing so, group projects will benefit the student more than hinder their knowledge development, and in turn, help better prepare students for working in the real world collaboratively.

It is important to consider the characteristics of effective group work when teaching to the first-year, general education college student. Group projects can be a concrete foundation for general education students in developing particular lifelong skill sets, important for future courses or careers.

General Education

Introduction

College general education curriculum is the basis for developing core knowledge and skills that students will need to master for career development (Zeszotarski, 1999). It is important to recognize that general education courses serve a purpose that is greater than keeping students busy in college. Despite student perceptions about general education being a waste of their time and having a lack of knowledge as to the purpose and value of general education, general education actually significantly prepares students for the real world (Stewart, 2010; Thompson et. al., 2015). In fact, general education courses emphasize teamwork skills in diverse groups, written and oral communication, and many more critical thinking based skills to help student make decisions in their lives (Glenn, 2009). Although universities should create general education curriculum that embodies their values and purpose as a university, it is also important for instructors to emphasize the value of the skills learned in general education courses to students (Most & Wellmon, 2015; Warner & Koeppel, 2009). Because this project focuses on group projects in general education, it is important to consider the purpose behind general education courses as well as student and instructor perceptions regarding general education.

General Education Purpose

According to Zeszotarski (1999), the purpose of general education is to ensure students are familiar with core knowledge as well as basic skills, thus allowing them to increase their abilities to access, manipulate, and evaluate information and sources. It is also important for general education to address a breadth of knowledge, enhance skills in computation, written expression, critical thinking, and help students acquire knowledge that

will help them make decisions in their everyday lives (Zeszotarski, 1999). General education courses should also emphasize teamwork skills in diverse groups, written and oral communication, and teach a habit of gathering and weighing evidence before forming a conclusion (Glenn, 2009). This practice in general education courses is important because students may not receive the opportunity in certain major courses to develop and practice these lifelong learning skills. Additionally, Zeszotarski (1999), emphasized the importance of teaching students multicultural studies to help them enhance their awareness of different perspectives, cultural and ethnic differences, and computer literacy to help promote cognizance of technological advancements.

In comparison, Warner and Koeppel (2009), defined general education as courses within a distribution schema that all students must pass as a requirement for graduation. In addition, the general education curriculum at a particular institution demonstrates the institution's mission, philosophy, values and culture (Warner and Koeppel, 2009). This curriculum supports the idea that the institution should collaboratively and carefully select general education requirements that embody the core of the university as a whole.

In a study that analyzed the total number of general education courses required, organized by retention rates and subject of general education courses (e.g. philosophy, social sciences, humanities, etc.), there was a variety in the number of courses in each subject, but there was similarity in the number of general education courses required between 14 and 16 courses. Therefore, while institutions require similar amounts of general education required courses, the course goals are individualized to meet the university's mission and values (Warner & Koeppel, 2009). This individualization is promising to students because it can

mean that students have more opportunity to choose courses that they are interested in and find meaningful to their lives, spirituality, or career goals.

Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015), explained how engaging students in general education courses is a challenge. It is proposed that engagement could increase if general education courses curriculum could connect to the student on a deeper level -- in their career goals, in the purpose of their lives, and in a significant and meaningful way to the student. Therefore, academic advisors are primary influencers to help make personal connections with students to help guide them to choose courses where they can find meaning, and develop the foundation skills to study the world through multiple disciplines and perspectives (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015).

First-year students hope to fulfill as many graduation requirements for their general education as fast as possible. Consequently, when students leave first-year-student orientations, they have a list of courses they hope to enroll in, but they have no valuable intent behind their plan to help make their general education meaningful to their lives and career goals (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015). In fact, Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015) reported on a study conducted to track college student spirituality through a series of surveys that discovered spirituality can be applied to most individuals, regardless of a religious affiliation. They also discovered that first-year undergraduate students were searching for spirituality, meaning, and purpose in their early college years; therefore, it would be important to incorporate reflection on personal experiences and beliefs to help students lead to better understandings of themselves when creating curriculum for general education courses in the “culture and belief” categories (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini,

2015). Adding these elements to coursework enriches students' college experiences by helping students develop a sense of purpose and value in their general education experience.

Moreover, Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015), suggested that if academic advisors could ask students big questions about the content of their general education courses—what they have learned, what connections they have made, throughout their time taking general education courses—advisors may be able to help guide students to engage in their general education courses on a deeper level. Engagement will give students a sense of purpose and value in the courses they are taking or aspiring to take to fulfill the general education requirement.

Furthermore, Stewart (2010) discussed how stronger links between university education and career development must be addressed. To help create this link, general education needs to have more relevance for students in career preparation. The article suggests that all universities should have a clear general education purpose in order to help build student skills. A balance of liberal education and vocational training may help students develop their abilities with more quality (Rybak, 2007). However, standardization among universities allows for better transfer of credits for students transferring from institution to institution (Rybak, 2007). Therefore, the current standardization allows more freedom for students to switch career paths. With the overarching goal of the article arguing for general education to prepare students for lives of significance and responsibility, it is also important to consider practical reasoning as critical thinking in the service of action and decision making, thus allowing students to learn to deliberate about possibilities for their lives and have responsibility to contribute to others' lives (Stewart, 2010).

Therefore, creating a foundation in general education is a critical point for student success in careers later on. However, students may not realize the skills they learn in their general education courses, which include problem identification, problem solving, rational analysis of decisions, recognition of external factors that facilitate or constrain decision making, and written and verbal communication skills, are valuable to employers and transferable to the workforce (Stewart, 2010). It is unfortunate that a lack of outward application when instructing these general education courses is shared with the students, and it is even more unfortunate that students actually perform worse in general education courses, which is where their foundational skills are being taught (Stewart, 2010). Thus, Stewart (2010) suggested that there is a need to develop greater integrative and innovative thinking to practice communication throughout university experiences, and instructors should link teaching to what their colleagues teach, as well as make their lessons relevant to career-oriented students.

General Education and Perceptions

Paulson (2012) conducted a survey about general education that asked faculty about their perceptions of the use of high impact practices. High impact practices help students achieve the intended general education learning outcomes. The study determined that the foundation for addressing broad goals for student learning in higher education is through general education curriculum, and that with the increase in the level of students attending higher education, it is critical to facilitate effective learning and participation in the classroom (Paulson, 2012). In fact, Paulson (2012), reported that instructors should facilitate opportunities for learners of general education committees at institutions in the system to work together in cohort-like groups to help student achievement of general education

learning outcomes. Thus, this study concluded, they should work in groups to assist in supporting student achievement for their students.

In looking at student knowledge and perceptions of general education curriculum, one study revealed that students had misconceptions about general education requirements and could be better informed about the relevance of general education courses (Thompson et al., 2015). Since general education curriculum contributes to intellectual development for college students, it is important to take a look at the student's perception of general education requirements. Thompson et al. (2015) discovered that 80% of 900 students surveyed were first-year students who did not know the basic facts about the requirements of general education. These data uncover an issue because if students do not know the requirements of general education, then they are even more unlikely to know the value their general education courses offer to their knowledge and skill sets.

According to Most and Wellmon (2015), curriculum is the design of what and how instructors share what is worth knowing, conserving, defending and stewarding to students that helps shape intellectual and moral habits and imaginations, which should be done in a dynamic and collaborative way. The curriculum and design methods instructors use have a significant effect on student perceptions. Thompson et al. (2015) discovered a correlation between instructor attitudes and student perceptions about general education. For example, instructors were found to possibly play a large role in aiding students to understand the purpose of general education courses, and if they expressed a lack of interest in teaching the general education courses, the students received signals that the course was not important (Thompson et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for instructors to demonstrate enthusiasm and demonstrate the value that general education courses can provide students. General

education courses help develop skills students need to help make valuable contributions to society.

One research report focused on examining the current general education curriculum structure at a large institution where the general education curriculum was redesigned to meet student needs (Cottrell et al., 2015). This report discovered through questionnaires to campus advisors and instructors that best practices for marketing general education curriculum to students included communicating a consistent message about its benefit to student learning (Cottrell et al., 2015). In communicating general education benefits to students, advisors can improve their relationship with students when meeting and discussing course offerings and selections, as well as aid students in choosing general education courses that interest them by integrating courses that count toward their majors, but also offer general education credit and skills.

According to Cottrell et al. (2015), general education curriculum provides benefits to undergraduate students who are exploring their academic potential for the first time as adults, and over the past few decades, universities have struggled with the perceived role of the general education curriculum and how to best impact the students through curriculum.

General education curriculum should focus on teaching students the skills needed to succeed in the workplace, these include the ability to interact with people from other cultures, understand different perspectives, and contribute to society—all of these skills outline what group projects can help condone (Cottrell et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, general education curriculum provides evidence for value in student skills, knowledge, and career preparation. It is important to consider instructor influences on

student perceptions when discussing general education courses. There should be an emphasis on the value of general education from the university and the faculty to motivate the students to engage in general education courses and gain meaningful knowledge and skills from these foundational courses. Hence, it is also critical to incorporate group projects into the general education curriculum to promote collaborative learning and communication skills, all of which are important to employers in the scheme of the workforce.

Conclusion

Group projects have many benefits in supporting student skill sets in higher education. Students are able to learn to work with others, improve their communication and interpersonal skills, and gain new perspectives (Maguire & Edmondson, 2001; Myers et al., 2009). In addition, it is important for instructors to develop a design that meets the needs of the students and promotes clear expectations and organized facilitation of the group project (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Since general education is an essential component of higher education, it is paramount to foster skills in students that will be useful for them in their careers. For example, general education courses should emphasize the value of learning, especially in practicing collaboration, motivation, and communication skills (Warner and Koepfel, 2009). In looking at instructor roles in this setting, their purpose should be to facilitate, promote enthusiasm, and foster positive learning opportunities for students, especially when incorporating group projects into the general education course (Stewart, 2010). Hence, group projects in general education courses should be constructed in a way that teaches the value of skills, university purpose, and engagement among students to help best prepare them to work collaboratively with others in the real world.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The handbook was created to help guide college instructors of first-year general education college students to facilitate the most meaningful and positive group experiences for students in their classes. The creation of the handbook was informed by an extensive literature review and a survey of university instructors and students. This handbook is also useful for more experienced instructors; however, it is designed to meet the needs of first-year college students.

The first step in the process was to conduct a literature review. Upon completing the literature review, prominent themes emerged in the articles. Based on these stand-out themes, I created a survey to administer to a northern California regional comprehensive rural university. My aim was to collect data connected to these themes. I then distributed the survey, analyzed the results, and compared my findings to the results of the original literature review. A second literature review, focusing on practical research on strategies and techniques was then conducted. Once this extensive research was complete, the project was created. I then synthesized the a) literature review, b) survey, and c) practical research literature review to create the handbook. The final step was to pilot the handbook; I asked an instructor of a first-year general education course to review the handbook and provide feedback.

Phase 1: Literature Review

The first literature review was created in sections. First, I researched literature using words such as *group projects*, *college*, *benefits*, *drawbacks*, and *instructor roles* to determine the main benefits and drawbacks to group work in college, as well as the instructor's role in the group work process.

Common themes emerged, noting benefits of group projects outweighing the drawbacks, and specific skill sets that develop when group projects are implemented in the college classroom. Some of these skills included written and oral communication, working with others, gaining new perspectives, collaboration, depth of knowledge, time-management, critical thinking strategies, and learning civic values.

Some main drawbacks were reported as conflict management, time-management, receiving the same grade mark as a fellow non-contributing group member, free riding, clashing personality types, and working with unmotivated people.

The literature also supported the role of instructor as a facilitator and one who helps foster the group experience. Further, the literature suggested that instructors (rather than students) should form groups based on the students' personality types and skill sets, and that instructors should administer individual tasks to group members and expect individual accountability. The literature also suggested that instructors provide frequent deadlines for group members and provide both group and individual feedback for students.

The next portion of the literature review focused on general education in college; key search words included *general education*, *group projects*, and *college*. I found that general education is a critical time for students to learn and develop lifelong skills that can help them in their upcoming courses, future careers, and life in general. Indeed, these general

education courses, while mandatory for graduation, help prepare students to take an interest in learning and develop an appreciation of the value of the skills they learn in these courses that are transferable elsewhere, such as critical thinking strategies and communication skills. Moreover, the research addressed the differing perspectives of students and instructors. Faculty perceived that grades for group members accurately reflected individual student performance, but students perceived that all members received the same grade, regardless of individual contributions. Therefore, this mismatch in perceptions demonstrated that instructors may need to adjust and adapt their instruction to connect with how students perceive group work.

The perspectives offered in the literature helped guide my construction of a survey, which I describe in the next section.

Phase 2: Survey

The next step was to consider first-year general education college students and how the skills learned in group projects benefits this population of students. Based on my review of the literature, I constructed a survey to administer to first-year students and instructors of first-year, general education courses. The survey was designed to measure student and instructor perceptions regarding the value of group work and the types of skills obtained during group project experiences. I focused on first-year general education courses, purposefully selecting for participation a group of 40 instructors who taught foundational courses at the university. I invited instructors to take the survey to administer to their students at the end of the Spring 2018 semester.

I constructed the survey items, gained approval by the institutional review board and created the survey using Survey Monkey. Before administering the survey to faculty and students, my committee members, approved by the institutional review board, and piloted with a Child Development faculty member at the university as well as a kinesiology student at the university.

After dispersing the survey, I interpreted the data using percentages, arithmetic means and standard deviations to describe the profiles of the respondents. I used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative responses of the benefits of group projects based on student perceptions. Descriptive statistics is an appropriate method for analyzing the results of a survey because this method points to causal understandings that are relevant to the present research study while informing policy, practice and research (Loeb et al., 2017). Descriptive statistics is a helpful tool because it can help identify and describe trends or phenomenons in populations or simply describe samples present in studies that can the identify causal effects (Loeb et al., 2017). Through the use of descriptive statistics, I then determined trends based on student and instructor responses. For questions that prompted written responses, I used the constant comparative method to analyze data (Loeb et al., 2017). This method allowed me to interpret the qualitative data by analyzing qualitative responses and allowing theory, themes, and groups to evolve based on the data collected.

Overall, I discovered that most students felt that more cooperative group members would have made the group project experience more positive for them. This was logical because cooperation was the highest ranked skill learned from the group project experience by students, therefore, in the group setting, students are most apt to practice this skill. In cooperating with team members and working with others (the two highest ranked skills

learned by students), of course it would be easier to participate in group projects when all members cooperate; however, this obstacle is what fosters students to cooperate and collaborate with the variety of students and perspectives, thus providing the opportunity for them to sharpen their cooperation skills.

In considering the small amount of instructor responses (five responses), as well as the relatively larger sample responses from the students (62 responses), it was appropriate to conclude that most instructors and students had similar value emphasis about group projects. Both students and instructors seemed to find the value in the learning process of working in groups and were able to separate frustrations from learning opportunities, and result in a positive outlook regarding their assigned group work.

Therefore, I concluded that these survey responses suggested students believed they benefited from group projects and learned basic cooperation and collaboration skills.

Phase 3: Identification of Best Practices

The following step in the research process was to identify the best practices for designing groupwork for first-year college students. This research was conducted mainly online via educational, university sources. In particular, Carnegie Mellon University had helpful tools in administering group work for college students, even though it did not focus on first-year students.

However, other sources demonstrated knowledge about how to work effectively with first-year students and provided information regarding methods specific to that population. These techniques included meeting students where they are at, appreciating their eagerness and enthusiasm for learning, and willingness to take risks. In addition, a significant

amount of maturation occurs over the first year of college for students, and instructors should be aware of this and help guide students through the transition, such as providing frequency of deadlines to help keep students on track. Instructors should also make course content relevant and provide appropriate feedback to help promote productive habits in first-year students.

The research in this area focused on practical techniques for working with first-year students and practical examples of group work strategies for college students. With all this in mind, I was able to gather information to compare to my first literature review, as well as my survey to then create the guide for instructors.

Phase 4: Current Project

The literature review, the survey, and the second practical literature review helped identify what was most important in structuring group work. Consequently, those results, combined with the literature review, led to the creation of my original acronym **DETAIL**. The components of **DETAIL** represent key tools for instructors to focus on upon introducing group projects to first-year general education students. **DETAIL** stands for deadlines, evaluations, team-building, assign individual tasks, instructor duties, and learning value.

The next step was to research practical applications through the literature to gather more evidence about how to best structure group work. After completing this step, the handbook was created. The project follows a logical structure where each letter of **DETAIL** is explained with a research-based description and examples of what it might look like in the classroom.

Phase 5: Handbook Review

After creating the handbook, I sent it to an instructor of a first-year general education small group communication course. The instructor provided me with some brief feedback indicating she was excited about the “DETAIL” model I created. She informed me that each element is something that is implemented at some level in her courses or strives to implement. The instructor believed that she could see this model useful for other instructors, as there are strong core ideas, but there may be a struggle with instructors adhering to the schedule (referring to the “Deadlines” portion of “DETAIL”) because of the amount of curriculum that would need to be embedded into each individualized course.

This feedback was valuable to me because it showed me that my model was indeed useful. I received first-hand opinions from a college instructor of first-year students that showed me that the “DETAIL” model would be beneficial in the classroom, but may pose challenges. I believe that implementing my “DETAIL” handbook would be the best next step in terms of deciphering the ultimate usefulness, advantages, and challenges in college classrooms.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

First-year general education college students are a unique population of individuals who are learning many skills, both academically and emotionally. While first-year students are experiencing life on their own for the first time, they are also acclimating to college courses and expectations. In these first-year general education courses, instructors are introducing group projects to students to help attain skill sets that are transferable to future courses, cooperation in everyday life, as well as future careers. These group experiences should be introduced and practiced in a meaningful way to encourage the most beneficial group experiences for students.

Throughout the research process, instructor and student perceptions regarding the value of group projects and the skills learned during group project experiences were analyzed. From the literature review, as well as a survey to 62 students and five instructors at a northern California university, the findings indicated a mutual value in group projects in the areas of cooperation when working with others and collaboration among both students and instructors. Other skills learned and valued from group projects included critical thinking strategies, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and written and oral communication skills.

Following these conclusions, an additional literature review was conducted on the topic to gain insight as to methods and practical strategies in incorporating group projects in first-year courses in college. From this research, the guide was created, which outlines an

acronym for instructors to use as a tool in guiding group projects for first-year students. The acronym is DETAIL, which stands for deadlines, evaluations, team building, assign individual tasks, instructor duties, and learning value. Further, the guide breaks down each letter of the acronym and supports it with research based information, followed by examples of how to incorporate it into the classroom. The guide aims to help instructors of first-year college students participate in and find more value in the group projects required in the courses. Its purpose is to enhance the experiences of college students and instructors during group projects.

Conclusions

Before this study, there was a lack of specific guides in enhancing the group project experiences for first-year college students in general education courses. There were studies that supported the first-year experience of college students, as well as studies regarding group projects in college classrooms. However, this study took a specific approach to target the first-year college student's perspectives and perceptions of group projects, while taking previous research into account. The outcome is a guide to help foster a more beneficial and meaningful experience for instructors of first-year college students in general education courses.

For instructors of first-year general education college students, the population of students in these courses is a special kind, with specific and critical needs that need to be met. For example, these students are on their own for the first time and must learn to be independent and responsible. It is important for the instructor to take student needs into account, especially when delivering group assignments. The guidebook will help instructors

tailor learning to the needs of this population. It includes recommendations for helping foster equality in group projects through assigning individual tasks and creating frequent deadlines for students. In addition, the guide provides visuals to help direct the instructor.

The guidebook takes into account specific needs of first-year general education college students, in order to assist the instructor in facilitating positive group experiences. Creating meaningful collaborative experiences in college will allow students to develop their transferable skills in working well with others.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the current study include ideas to help create experiences for first-year general education college students in group projects that are the most meaningful and valuable to their future careers and college success. There are a few main recommendations that would benefit instructors of first-year general education college students when implementing group projects. Based on the guidebook created in this project, these recommendations are fitting.

First, there should be more research conducted on this specific population and their attitudes and perceptions toward the value of group projects. With additional research on the specific population of first-year general education college students, the present study could be strengthened. More research concludes to more data and thus, a deeper understanding of what instructors and educators can do to improve the quality of group project experiences in college.

Next, a recommendation is to create or implement a training or workshop for professors. This would be tailored specifically toward addressing group projects in first-year

general education college courses, however, would be useful for instructors of other college students as well, as many of the key concepts, attitudes, and transferable skills learned from group projects can be connected to a wider range of student populations at the college level.

Another recommendation is to create an online discussion board for instructors of first-year general education college students. The discussion board would provide a place for instructors to share their own practices regarding group projects, including their successes and failures when implementing group work. This could be helpful for instructors within a university and kept confidential through a database within each university. This way, instructors can collaborate with one another to help build the quality of group projects. Further, this concept could later be used for research in the area of group projects in college to help produce additional, relative, and current guidebooks for instructors that could also potentially be used in trainings or workshops for other professors.

Finally, it is recommended that the guidebook created from this project be tested and researched by a college instructor of first-year general education students. Piloting will help determine the practical usefulness of the guidebook and help future researchers to build on and improve the creation of guidebooks for instructors for group projects.

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APPENDIX

DETAIL Project Guidebook

Introductory Note

The goal of this guide is to help direct college instructors of first-year general education students in facilitating the most meaningful and positive group experiences for students in their classes. First-year college students are a vulnerable population because they are learning many skills all at once. With independence and new responsibilities, it is important for this population to be attaining lifelong skills that will help them in and out of the classroom. This guide helps support instructors in providing meaning and value to student group work. It will allow instructors to improve their own skills in fool-proofing collaborative work in the classroom, while also helping students reach their full potential in practicing lifelong collaboration skills when participating in group work in the classroom. The following manual outlines a simple acronym to keep in mind when administering group work to first-year general education college students. Each letter of the acronym stands for an idea to practice and make sure is included when facilitating group work. Instructors will use this guide to clarify each of the letters of the acronym and feel more confident in achieving positive learning outcomes from the group experience after using this guide. So, remember the ‘DETAIL.’

DETAIL

D- Deadlines

E- Evaluations

T- Team building

A- Assign individual tasks

I- Instructor duties

L- Learning value

D: Deadlines

Deadlines are a critical part of group work for students. Especially in the first-year student, it is critical to instill time-management skills in students by providing them with weekly check-ins or frequent deadlines to keep students on track and used to getting work completed on time (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015; Hansen, 2006). With all the other stresses of being a first-year student -- moving into dorms, balancing daily chores, being social, attending classes and extracurriculars, and getting used to living on their own, it will be critical for instructors to provide a schedule of deadlines to prevent students from ever falling too far behind.

Instructors should create calendars for students with major deadlines for group projects highlighted, and minor deadlines that lead up to the final group culminating activity in a different color. Research has indicated that each group member should be responsible for his or her own individual work and have specific deadlines for that work to ensure no ‘free-riding’ of students in groups (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). This will help keep students accountable and on task throughout the semester.

Providing frequent deadlines, and providing students with feedback after each deadline (i.e. students take a quiz then the instructor provides them with feedback for problems they missed; students turn an assignment in and the instructor provides feedback about where to improve) will help first-year students develop a better understanding of the expectations of the class and of college courses themselves. Meeting deadlines is a crucial routine to adhere to in college. Frequency of deadlines for students will also help them acquire the “time-management” skill in group project work (Northern Illinois University, 2009). Time management is a transferable skill to other courses, other aspects of student life,

as well as future career endeavors. Further, providing frequent feedback when students turn in assignments on the deadline will allow them to adapt to the expectations of the college course (Mcdaniel, 2018). This will also help first-year students adjust to the transition from high school coursework to college coursework standards.

As demonstrated in *Figure 1* there are intermediary deadlines throughout the month for students to visually see what is due when. Each task will build on one another to amount to the final group presentation. This will help students stay accountable for their own tasks and prevent procrastination by having portions of the project due on a weekly basis.

Calendar of Intermediary Tasks

January 2018						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Week 1 Orientation/Forming Groups	1 Self-Assessment Quizzes/Share	2	3 Forming Groups/Group Norms	4	5 Choose Group Topic	6
7 Week 2 Individual Tasks/Taking Initiative	8 Share/Discuss Strengths	9	10 Assign Individual Tasks	11	12 Work on Individual Tasks	13
14 Week 3 Getting Started/Individual Work	15 Task 1 Due (i.e. Research on Topic)	16	17 Task 2 Due (i.e. Script for Presentation)	18	19 Work on Individual Tasks/Meet as Group	20
21 Week 4 PowerPoints/Practicing	22 Task 3 Due (i.e. Outline of PowerPoint)	23	24 Task 4 Due (i.e. Self Check-in, Meet as Group)	25	26 Meet as Group; Address Any Conflicts	27
28 Week 5 Group Presentations	29 Meet with Instructor Individually	30	31 Group Presentations DUE	Notes: Tasks are due at 3:30pm (Unless Otherwise Noted)		

Figure 1. A monthly calendar to distribute to students that serves as a visual of individual deadlines leading up to the final presentation. Each class has a specific assignment or deadline associated with it. Students will use this calendar to stay on track and utilize it to know what is due and when it is due.

E: Evaluations

Evaluations are the aspect of group work that helps instructors analyze effectiveness of the project (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Sun, Harris, Walther, & Baiocchi, 2015).

Therefore, evaluations are necessary to collect in multiple ways. There are three main methods to evaluating students in the group project setting -- instructor evaluations, self-evaluations, and peer evaluations. Each evaluation method has its own benefits and assesses different aspects of student performance and participation. All three ways should be added together to determine the overall evaluation for each individual group member. The following methods are described and provide an example as a visual aid for instructors to implement.

Method 1: Instructor Evaluations

Instructors should evaluate students based on a rubric designed to evaluate the degree to which the student met noted standards or objectives of the project. This evaluation should be a confidential matter that is only shared with the individual student and provides feedback from the instructor (LaBeouf, Griffith, & Roberts, 2016). To provide feedback, the instructor will provide a score and comments that acknowledge areas of strength and provide suggestions to help the student improve. The instructor evaluation should count for a portion of the overall group project grade for that individual (LaBeouf, Griffith, & Roberts, 2016). In addition, throughout the duration of the group project, the instructor can frequently check in with the students to monitor their individual understanding and progress in the group. This can be informal, where instructors briefly chat with students, check in on the equity of the division of work among members, or give opportunities for students to write an exit slip that

allows students to describe how the group process is going for them and if they have concerns.

Figure 2 represents an example of an instructor evaluation rubric that the instructor would complete during or after the full group presentation. Each member has their own individual column that is averaged with the other group members to create one final group grade. This grade should be considered with other methods of evaluation to determine the overall individual grade of each group member.

Instructor Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Missing (0)	Totals
Organization	Presentation is logically structured, audience can follow with ease	Presentation has few areas that do not follow a sequence, mostly structured in audience-friendly manner	Presentation is not organized in a logical manner, hard to follow	Presentation does not follow any structure, or nonexistent	
Presentation Skills	Majority of notes not read, frequent eye contact, professional attire, speaks clearly	Some notes read, less frequent eye contact, professional attire, speaks mostly clear	Notes read, minimal eye contact, lacks professional attire, speaks mostly clear	Notes completely read, no eye contact, lacks professional attire, does not speak clearly, or at all	
Content Clarity	Masters content, ability to answer questions, presents information in understandable manner	Shares content with ease, may struggle to answer questions, presents information in a mostly understandable manner	Has difficulty presenting content, cannot answer questions, presents information in a mostly understandable manner	Fails to comprehend content, fails to present content to class	
Contribution	Contributes to presentation equally	Contributes to presentation less than others	Contribution to presentation is minimal	Does not contribute to presentation	
Aesthetics	Presentation is aesthetically pleasing, contains legible wording, graphics included	Presentation is aesthetically pleasing, some illegible wording, graphics included	Presentation is simple, some words difficult to read, lacks graphics	Presentation is minimal, difficult to read, or nonexistent	
Group Member 1:					/15
Group Member 2:					/15
Group Member 3:					/15
Group Total:	<i>Group Member 1:</i>	<i>Group Member 2:</i>	<i>Group Member 3:</i>	<i>Average Score: (Group Member 1+2+3÷3 Members)</i>	/15

Figure 2. A rubric designed to evaluate each group member during a final presentation by the instructor. Each member has a column for an individual group participation grade, that is then averaged with the other group members to determine a single, group presentation grade. This grade should be considered with self-evaluation and peer-evaluation grading rubrics to decide the final individual grade for each group member.

Method 2: Self-Evaluations

Students should evaluate themselves based on a rubric designed to evaluate the degree to which the student felt he or she met the standards or objectives of the project. This should be a confidential matter that is only shared with the instructor (Labeouf, Griffith, & Roberts, 2016). This form of assessment will allow the student to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses and provide a space for the student to share any personal difficulties he or she faced during the group project. It will also allow the student to share if he or she felt they contribute equally to the group project. The self-evaluation should count for a portion of the overall group project grade for that individual (Labeouf, Griffith, & Roberts, 2016).

Figure 3 represents a rubric of a self-evaluation. Each individual member of the group would fill this out in relation to themselves and their contributions to the group project experience. The student has the opportunity to write in comments about their own contributions. The hope is that they are honest and give a detailed report of their own contributions. This will be a portion of the overall individual grade for the student who participated in the group project.

Self Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Missing (0)	Totals
Preparation	<u>Always</u> completed assigned tasks on time; always came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready or completed	<u>Typically</u> completed assignments on time; typically came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready or completed.	<u>Sometimes</u> completed assignments; sometimes came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready.	<u>Never</u> showed up and never contributed.	
Contribution	<u>Always</u> contributed, contributions were excellent	<u>Typically</u> contributed, contributions were satisfactory	<u>Sometimes</u> contributed, contributions not always adequate	<u>Never</u> contributed	
Leadership	<u>Always</u> willing to lead or take control when opportunity arose, team player, collaborated effectively	<u>Typically</u> willing to lead or take control when opportunity arose, mostly a team player, collaborated with others	<u>Sometimes</u> willing to lead, but did not volunteer, rarely took control when opportunities arose; contributed to team but may have caused or participated in conflict	<u>Failed</u> to take the lead, caused conflict	
Self:					/9
Comments:					

Figure 3. A rubric designed to evaluate individuals by themselves, as a self-evaluation. Each group member would be given one of these rubrics. This evaluation grade should be considered with instructor evaluation and peer-evaluation grading rubrics to decide the final individual grade for each group member.

Method 3: Peer-Evaluations

Students should evaluate their peers in their immediate groups based on a rubric designed to evaluate the degree to which the student felt his or her group members met the standards or objectives of the project. This should be confidential between the instructor and the instructor to ensure honest and valid peer reviews, unless there is a situation which would require the instructor to share evidence of non-compliance with multiple members of the group (Labeouf, Griffith, & Roberts, 2016). This form of assessment will allow students to evaluate each others' strengths, weaknesses, and level of participation and contribution to the group project. The peer-evaluation should count for a portion of the overall group project grade for each individual.

Figure 4 demonstrates a rubric to assess peers. Each individual in a group would receive this rubric to evaluate his or her peers in their own group. This grade would be taken into consideration with the self-evaluation and the instructor evaluation. The idea of giving a peer evaluation is to assess the group member contribution levels and address any frustrations or issues that culminated in the group experience. The confidentiality factor is to allow students to be honest about contribution levels of group members. This will provide students a space to share thoughts and feelings about group members to ensure a more positive experience in the future.

Peer Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Missing (0)	Totals
Preparation	<u>Always</u> completed assigned tasks on time; always came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready or completed	<u>Typically</u> completed assignments on time; typically came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready or completed.	<u>Sometimes</u> completed assignments; sometimes came to team sessions with necessary documents and materials ready.	<u>Never</u> showed up and never contributed.	
Contribution	<u>Always</u> contributed, contributions were excellent	<u>Typically</u> contributed, contributions were satisfactory	<u>Sometimes</u> contributed, contributions not always adequate	<u>Never</u> contributed	
Leadership	<u>Always</u> willing to lead or take control when opportunity arose, team player, collaborated effectively	<u>Typically</u> willing to lead or take control when opportunity arose, mostly a team player, collaborated with others	<u>Sometimes</u> willing to lead, but did not volunteer, rarely took control when opportunities arose; contributed to team but may have caused or participated in conflict	<u>Failed</u> to take the lead, caused conflict	
Group Member 1:					/9
Group Member 2:					/9
Group Member 3:					/9

Figure 4. A rubric designed to evaluate individual group members, by the other group members. This is a peer evaluation that gives each group member one of these rubrics. This evaluation grade should be considered with instructor evaluation and self-evaluation grading rubrics to decide the final individual grade for each group member.

T: Team-building

Team-building is shown to increase student collaboration and break down barriers in the team atmosphere (Hansen, 2006; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). These team-building exercises will allow students to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and may foster working with others and gaining new perspectives by learning about one another. Research has shown that team building can also help increase motivation, productivity, cooperation, collaboration, and encourage creativity (Hansen, 2006; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). It is important to begin with team-building exercises before distributing group projects for students to become familiar with one another and also learn about themselves, and how they interact with the partners in their groups. By learning a bit about one another, it may allow group members to gain insight on cultural backgrounds of peers or perspectives of peers. This can stimulate students to improve understanding of different perspectives -- which is a transferable skill first-year students can benefit learning. In addition, research shows that by incorporating team-building exercises that include personality assessment tests, students can learn and practice determining their own skill strengths, weaknesses, as well as help improve group interaction and self-reflection processes by encouraging self-awareness (Virtual HR, 2017).

Figure 5 showcases a chart with suggestions of team-building exercises used in college classrooms. This chart indicates the name of the team building exercise followed by a short description of the exercise. The exercises can be utilized to help improve team building and relationships in groups before group projects commence.

Team-Building Chart

Team-Building Exercise	Description
BIG 5 Personality Test	Discover the strength of your five major personality traits based on a series of questions: Openness, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness
Have You Ever	Students write down answers to a series of “Have you ever” questions provided by the instructor and raise their hand if they answer yes, and explain the story (i.e. Have you ever met a celebrity?)
2 Truths and a Lie	Students write down two truths and a lie about themselves and share among the group and the group guesses which one is a lie
Color Personality Test	Discover your true color (Blue, Gold, Orange, Green) shares about your strengths and weaknesses in your individual personality based on a series of questions
16 Personalities Test	Traits that are a combination of letters to describe your personality based on a series of questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Extraverted (E) or Introverted (I) ■ Sensing (S) or Intuition (N) ■ Thinking (T) or Feeling (F) ■ Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)
Spirit Animal Quiz	Answer a few questions to come up with a spirit animal, not based on science, just for fun and entertainment
Skills You Need Test	A test that reveals your interpersonal skills and may share what your strengths and weaknesses are and what areas you can improve
Marshmallow Challenge	The task is to build the tallest freestanding structure in teams with 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string, and one marshmallow in eighteen minutes and the marshmallow must go on top
Headbands Game	Cards of certain themes (i.e. zoo animals, foods, places, etc.) are placed face down on a table and members choose a card and place it on their forehead and use ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions from their peers to guess what word is on their headband

Figure 5. A chart detailing a name of a team building exercise, followed by a brief description of the exercise.

Following group activities such as those mentioned in *Figure 5*, it is important for instructors to facilitate an extension of critical thinking. For example, the instructor should act as a facilitator in posing questions after the activities, such as asking students what they thought they just did, what they just experienced, or what did that experience have to do with how well individuals work together. These activities should serve as a heuristic approach to learning that will support students processing meaning behind the team-building activity.

Once students have participated in team building exercises, it is important for them to develop group norms. Research has indicated that establishing group norms will allow each group member to share their personal values, goals, and conflict management procedures and allow the group to begin practicing collaboration skills in developing these norms (Hansen, 2006). The norms will also foster through communication between group members and provide them with a tangible document to refer to in times of conflict.

It is important for groups to establish group norms that each member endorses. These are collaborative rules that the group is expected to follow. These norms are created by the group themselves.

Allowing each student to write down a few core values and expectations they have for themselves when working in a group may be a first step in establishing group norms. After each member has written down five or so, they can share with others. Then, the group can discuss what they all find important in maintaining during group projects and firm up their group norms.

Figure 6 provides a few examples of group norms students may choose to create in their groups before beginning their group projects. It is important for students to agree on the norms and develop the norms based on values or policies they feel are most important to

them when working with others. Students can use prior experience in working in groups to help shape these norms.

Group Norm Chart

Examples of Group Norms
Our group meetings will begin and end on time.
Our group will listen to one another and not interrupt.
Our group will arrive to group meetings on time and prepared.
Our group will respond to group text messages regarding the group project.
Our group will speak respectfully and avoid gender or ethnic-based humor.

Figure 6. Examples of group norms students may choose to create for their group. These are important values to the group, or policies in which they agree to abide by over the duration of the group project experience.

A: Assign individual tasks

After the norms are established, the group will be familiar with each others' strengths and weaknesses and be able to assign personalized duties and contributions. Research has indicated that individual task assignments are an important component to creating positive group project experiences for students and allow students to be personally accountable, while diminishing the opportunity for 'free-riders' to tag along on the group project and complete limited work (Bailey, Barber, & Ferguson, 2015; Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Millis, & Cottell, Jr., 1998; Smith, 1996). Eliminating as many opportunities for unequal work distribution among group members will allow for a better learning experience for students. When members have designated roles, it can eliminate strong personalities from dominating the disbursement of work. By giving students a list of individual roles, students can delegate appropriate roles to each individual based on strengths (Hansen, 2006; Helms & Haynes, 1990). The roles can be fixed or rotating throughout the semester, based on instructor goals of the project.

Figure 7 provides a chart that indicates an example of a student role followed by a brief description of what that role may entail. There is flexibility in these roles and expectations of these roles. It will be important for the instructor to detail what roles are necessary for each group, depending on the group project design itself. The instructor should choose relevant student roles for the specific group project type.

Student Role Chart

Role	Description
Facilitator	Moderates team discussion, keeps the group on task, and distributes work.
Recorder	Takes notes summarizing team discussions and decisions, and keeps all necessary records.
Reporter	Serves as group spokesperson to the class or instructor, summarizes the group's activities and/or conclusions.
Timekeeper	Keeps the group aware of time constraints and deadlines; makes sure meetings start and end on time.
Devil's Advocate	Raises counter-arguments and (constructive) objections, introduces alternative explanations and solutions.
Harmonizer	Strives to create a harmonious and positive team atmosphere and reach consensus (while allowing a full expression of ideas).
Prioritizer	Makes sure group focuses on most important issues and does not get caught up in details.
Explorer	Seeks to uncover new potential in situations and people (fellow team members but also clients) and explore new areas of inquiry.
Innovator	Encourages imagination and contributes new and alternative perspectives and ideas.
Checker	Checks to make sure all group members understand the concepts and the group's conclusions.
Runner	Gets needed materials and is the liaison between groups and between their group and the instructor.
Wildcard	Assumes the role of any missing member and fills in wherever needed.

Figure 7. A chart which depicts roles of the student followed by a brief description of what that role entails.

Adapted from: Carnegie Mellon University. (2016). Group Project Tools - Eberly Center - Carnegie Mellon University.
Retrieved from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html>

Further, a non-compliance policy, such as a protocol to enforce if a group member is not contributing to the project should be established by the instructor upon introducing the group project (Murray, 2017). One method to enforcing this is using captainships, which assigns each member with a specific title and duty (i.e. a team manager, leader, scheduler, gatekeeper, social or emotional leader, etc.) where students are able to reflect on their individual responsibilities. This can allow for students to practice communication and negotiation skills with one another and allow student to use their voice when a member is not holding up their end of the work.

However, in a college setting, a document that outlines a specific protocol may be more beneficial. For example, a document may read that students who are not complying may have three chances, or less to complete their work with a point deduction every offense. Another option may be to have a procedure for if a student does not meet the deadlines and must first meet with the instructor, receive a point deduction, and have a new deadline to meet, since ultimately, the group is counting on the student to complete the work, it will be critical each member completes his or her part. A tool to help aid this sort of non-compliance policy is to have weekly check-ins and ongoing deadlines for students throughout the semester to ensure participation (as mentioned in D: Deadlines).

I: Instructor duties

Instructors are to be facilitators in administering group projects (Bailey, Barber & Ferguson, 2015). This means they are allowing freedom for student learning, while also providing enough support and guidance to ease extensive group frustrations. Instructors should be organized and explicit in their expectations and directions for group projects. By establishing boundaries, students will be more inclined to participate and feel more responsibility to do their share of work (Cornell University, 2012)

At the very beginning of a group project, the first step as the instructor is to facilitate equal representation of groups by selecting them based on a non-randomized method (Bailey, Barber & Ferguson, 2015). This means it is the instructor who should be constructing the groups, rather than the students. This eliminates social pressure for students, while also allowing the instructor to develop groups that are balanced in skill domains. This is more representative of workplace grouping because in the real world, people of all different skills are matched into a group that will effectively communicate their own personal skills to enhance the group product. Further, the groups should be no more than four members per group have specific tasks for each individual.

Figure 8 provides tips for instructors about how to form groups. These tips can be taken into account when deciding which students should belong in what group. It is important to consider these tips when creating groups in order to produce equally skillful groups to set students up for the most success in the group experience as possible. Considering these also naturally allows students to reduce the social pressure of having to construct groups themselves, since the instructor is forming the groups, rather than self-selecting groups.

Group Formation Chart

5 Tips on How to Form Groups
Arrange groups based on strengths and weaknesses
Give out personality tests to students before creating groups to gain an idea of their temperament and personalities
Create groups based on a variety of different personalities, experiences, backgrounds, etc.
Be sure to have a more 'expert' student in each group to help add knowledge
Based on these assessments, purposefully blend abilities to create groups of no more than four members per group

Figure 8. A chart of tips for instructors about how to form groups. These tips can be considered when forming groups to keep groups equally skilled and reduce frustrations among groups.

Research has indicated that enthusiasm is a critical factor in increasing engagement in group activities for college aged students (Thompson, Eodice, & Tran, 2015). Student perceptions about curriculum are related to instructor attitudes about the subject matter. A lack of interest in teaching a general education course can send negative signals to students and thus decrease participation. Educators who express enthusiasm and demonstrate interest and value in the subject can offer a different, more engaging experience for their students.

First-year students especially are new to the experience of college courses and college instructors. In general, most students are enthusiastic and excited, with a willingness to take risks (Castillo, 2014). However, others may give the “deer in the headlights” look. Hence, it is important to meet students where they are at, and provide a rationale for them about value of the course at hand. By being enthusiastic about the topic, it may enlighten and shape students to buy into the college experience and actually gain more skills from the course.

Enthusiasm is not asking instructors to be passionate about everything they teach, but is expecting instructors to bring an external presence to the content and demonstrate excitement for the project at hand to translate this participatory attitude into the students (Burgess, 2012). When students see the instructor excited to participate, it can create a domino effect and make them more willing to buy into the project, even if they are apprehensive about group work. Enthusiasm is essential.

L: Learning value

Learning is the most important part of a group project. Hence, the value placed on what students will be learning is essential in constructing a positive opportunity for students to learn.

Therefore, when introducing a group project to students, it is important to be clear about the skills students will be expected to practice and learn throughout the process (Cornell University, 2012). If the instructor wants the emphasis to be on students learning how to work with others, it is important to communicate this at the beginning to students and engrain that objective in their mind. This way, students can feel as though they are gaining practice in that area during the project.

In addition, research has shown that in general education courses especially, it is important for instructors to share the value in the project for the students (Zeszotarski, 1999). Students taking general education courses may feel that those courses are a waste of time, but in reality, they are learning transferable skills such as critical thinking and gaining new perspectives that they will use throughout their academic endeavors and personal lives. Therefore, describing these values to students and being upfront about the goals the instructor has for student learning outcomes will diminish differing perceptions instructors and students have about what is expected to be learned (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015).

Figure 9 shows a chart to consider when instructors are planning to emphasize value in their instruction to help students relate to the topic and increase enthusiasm in the classroom about the content.

Value Emphasis Chart

How to Emphasize Value
Allow students to choose topics relevant to their lives/current issues/current topics
Connect lessons to student lives/interests
Foster student development of skills they will utilize in everyday lives/professional lives (collaboration, gaining new perspectives, working with others, etc.)
Share what skills students will be mastering before assigning projects
General education students are learning many skills in their first year of college so it is important to capitalize on transferable skills they can learn in the classroom. (i.e. Learning collaboration skills may help them in future classes, prepare for future career goals, and may even help them in their personal lives or dorm living situation, using their voice)

Figure 9. A chart that provides instructors with a list of ideas about how to emphasize value in the classroom to reach students on a deeper level and increase engagement.

Conclusion

In review, this handbook was created for the benefit of college instructors of first-year general education students. The intent was for instructors to gain insight as to a research-based method to facilitating group projects and to give students an optimal opportunity for a successful outcome when learning in groups. The handbook covered a discussion with examples of the original acronym “DETAIL.” DETAIL stands for Deadlines, Evaluations, Team-building, Assign individual tasks, Instructor duties, and Learning values. Overall, the handbook provided a guide for this population to help enhance group work in college.

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