

Quick-set Groups: The Impact of Using a Pre-Class Survey on Establishing Effective Student Work Groups

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Abstract

When a professional Master's degree program shifted to an accelerated online calendar of intensive 7-week courses, faculty felt that group work was not something they could implement immediately. During 2022, one course brought it back, with groups assigned randomly prior to the first day of class. While those groups were fairly successful (i.e., assignments were completed and demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes), a literature review identified factors that can improve a group's chance for success: formation of groups with "like-minded" members (Lowenthal & Trespacio, 2022, p. 66), who have similar availability during the week and working styles (Trekles, 2013). In the next course implementing group work, prior to the semester beginning, the instructor sent all students a survey asking them to identify their preferred case study organization to work with, availability for working on assignments during the week vs. weekend and day vs. evening hours, and preference for mode of group work (i.e., via email, shared documents, or collaborative writing during virtual meetings). This paper will focus on the effectiveness of that pre-class survey in creating student work groups. Content analysis of Group Contracts will identify "firing clauses" selected by groups to compare to results of whether anyone was "fired" from a group in the two classes and compare Peer Review comments to Group Contracts to determine the relationship of selected contract clauses to peer review criteria used by students. The overarching goal is to share best practices in forming effective student working groups.

Keywords: andragogy; collaborative learning; graduate education; library and information studies; online learning