Faculty-Student Differences In Perceptions Of Group Work

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Faculty-Student Differences in Perceptions of Group Work

Trent W. Maurer, Diana Sturges, Padmini Shankar, Deborah Allen, & Saida Akbarova
Background

Group work has many benefits:

• Increases student motivation and academic achievement (Springer et al., 1997)
• Increases student learning on multiple indicators (Cooper et al., 2000)
• Students perform better on group assessments than individual assessments (Knight, 2004)
Background

• Students’ grades improve with required group work, especially for the weakest students (Mahalingam et al., 2008)
• Millennials expect team activities (Atkinson, 2004) that reflect real-world working relationships
Yet, students object:

- They think it is a way for faculty to avoid work (Gottschall & Garcia-Bayonas, 2008)
- They think it’s often a waste of time (McClanahan & McClanahan, 2002)
- They think it often results in an unfair distribution of work and grades (Furnham et al., 2008)
And faculty object:

- Numerous logistical problems with using group work; very time consuming (Burdett, 2007)
- Unless grades are tied to group effort, group members often work individually and just share answers, defeating the purpose (Hawthorn & Ingram, 2002)
Background

Prior research has not assessed a common group of faculty and students to *compare* perceptions of uses of group work, problems/barriers, and solutions to overcoming those problems.

I.e., What do faculty do and what do students *think* faculty do?
Method

- On-line mixed-methods survey of faculty and student perceptions of group work
- Faculty invited through university e-mail distribution list and personal encouragement (N = 93)
- Students invited by faculty in classes (N = 257)
Method

• Students:
  • 3 demographic questions
  • 4 learning style questions
  • 22 quantitative questions
  • 4 qualitative questions

• Faculty
  • 5 demographic questions
  • 4 learning style questions
  • 21 quantitative questions
  • 10 qualitative questions
Faculty Characteristics

GENDER OF GSU FACULTY
- Males: 38%
- Females: 62%

ETHNICITY OF GSU FACULTY
- White: 90%
- African American: 3%
- Hispanic: 4%
- Asian: 1%
- Other: 1%
Faculty Characteristics

USE OF GROUP WORK

- Every Day: 11%
- 1-2 Times a Week: 25%
- 1-2 Times a Month: 27%
- 1-2 Times a Semester: 26%
Student Characteristics

**Gender of Student**
- Male: 74%
- Female: 26%

**Ethnicity of Student**
- White: 77%
- African American: 16%
- Hispanic: 2%
- Asian: 3%
- Other: 2%
Student Characteristics

EDUCATION LEVEL OF STUDENTS

- 31% Senior
- 27% Graduate
- 19% Sophomore
- 15% Junior
- 5% Freshman
- 4% Other
Student Characteristics

STUDENT ROLE IN GROUP WORK

- Leader: 60%
- Presenter: 50%
- Recorder: 40%
- Discussant: 30%
Results

Types of Group Work

- Any*
- In Class*
- Out Class
- Graded*
- Ungraded*

Faculty
Student
What is your attitude towards group work?*
Results

Attitudes

Experience

Learning Style

Faculty

Student

0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
Results

Group Work Influences:

- **Learning**: Faculty (4.5), Student (3.5)
- **Grades**: Faculty (4.0), Student (3.0)
- **Working with others**: Faculty (4.5), Student (4.0)

*Note: The asterisk indicates statistically significant differences.*
Results

Time Frame

- In Class
- Next Class
- 1-2 weeks*
- 3-4 weeks
- Over 4 weeks

Faculty

Student
Results

Assign Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same grade*</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff grade</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed + Individual</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divide Grade</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Problems

- Don't want groups*
- Don't know how*
- Exclude member*
- Devalue contributions*

Don't want groups: Faculty 60% vs. Student 50%
Don't know how: Faculty 70% vs. Student 30%
Exclude member: Faculty 35% vs. Student 25%
Devalue contributions: Faculty 40% vs. Student 45%
Results

Problems

- Pick friends
- Different abilities
- Fair Share
- Meeting
- Drop/Stop
- Unprepared
- Socialize
- Argue how
- Argue role

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Faculty
Student
Results

Strategies

- Explained benefits*
- Made grading clear*
- Taught group skills*
- Monitored groups*
- Rewarded more work*
- Replaced drops*
- Replaced member*
- Set ground rules*

Legend:
- Faculty
- Student
Results

Strategies

Assigned groups
Let pick groups
Encourage narcing
Evaluate each other
Assign tasks
Individual grades
Self-evaluation

Faculty
Student
Results

Faculty: What comes to mind when you hear GW?

- Collaboration/team work: 25
- Discussion/socializing: 7
- Learning: 5
- Negative feelings: 10
- Nonsense answers: 2
- Scheduling/time issues: 6
- Unequal distribution of work: 9
- Waste of time: 8
Results

Students: What comes to mind when you hear GW?

- Large projects: 8
- Could be good: 13
- Division of work/easier: 11
- Don’t want/like it: 28
- Group dynamics issues: 19
- Interaction: 9
- “Who’s in the group?”: 26
- Scheduling/time issues: 12
- Unequal share of work: 73
- Waste of time: 10
- Wish I could do it by myself: 12
- Working/studying together: 40
### What comes to mind?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “Wasted time, politics, and personal vendettas.”</td>
<td>• “Collaborating on projects, learning from each other, sharing knowledge, becoming more confident with the material working with other students to figure out a problem or complete a discussion.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “a group of 4-5 people working together on a project”</td>
<td>• “How am I going to grade this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “who will be the leader and will they be effective “</td>
<td>• “Disorganized waste of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “ who won’t do their part, chaos, confusion”</td>
<td>• “Sitting around and wasting time or one person doing the main work while the others do the minimum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “difficulty getting together, difficult to figure out who is doing what. Oh Crap!!!”</td>
<td>• “Loss of time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;Thank God I get to work in a group because it will help me understand what we are doing&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Stress of figuring out everyone's schedules to meet”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Faculty: How students perceive group work?

- Negative: 20
- Positive: 17
- Some like it, some don't: 12
- Unfair grading: 3
- Beneficial/helps learn material: 4
- Other: 2

Don't know: 2
Free riders issues: 5
Less work for prof: 2
Results

Faculty: Advantages of group work.

- Learning to work with others: 29
- Less grading: 8
- More can be accomplished: 5
- Other: 13
- Participation and engagement: 8
- "Real world" experience: 9
- Sharing /learning from each other: 36
Students: Advantages of group work.

- Better grade: 5
- Collaboration/interaction: 38
- Division of labor: 80
- Help from others/learning: 54
- Learning to work with others: 64
- None: 7
- Other: 10
- "Real world" experience: 9
## Advantages of Group Work

### Students
- “That old adage "Two heads are better than one" sums it up. It is also a division of labor, which puts responsibility on more than one person's shoulders.”
- “There really are none. It is completely a waste of my time as I am an independent learner and always have been.”
- “Learning to work with others.”
- “The benefits of group work include: enhancing communication skills, teamwork abilities, and meeting new people.”
- “I think group work can make learning the material fun. I also think that it can help people who struggle with lecture style classes grasp the information.”

### Faculty
- “Learn from each other. Gives people a chance to speak up.”
- “Learning to work together”
- “Solving a task together is an essential skill for a pending career.”
- “Students can help each other. I don't have to grade as many papers!”
- “Less to grade, forces students to interact, gets those who otherwise wouldn't talk to at least talk within the group”
Results

Faculty: Disadvantages of group work.
Results

Students: Disadvantages of group work.

- Grade dependent on other members: 35
- Negative group dynamics: 41
- No learning: 12
- None: 1
- Scheduling/logistics issues: 38
- Some members need to "catch up": 4
- Unequal participation/distribution of workload: 135
- Unproductive/time consuming: 50
- Other: 13
## Disadvantages of Group Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I don't see anything wrong with groupwork.”</td>
<td>“Students not doing their part. Pressure to do other student's work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The personal &quot;relationships&quot; in group work are absolutely not worth the hassle of dealing with when nearly every group I have ever been a part of ends up with at least one person attempting to throw someone else under the bus.”</td>
<td>“Poorly written reports (looks like individual work was pasted together at the last minute)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Everyone not participating”</td>
<td>“Takes lots of time dealing with slackers and members not motivated to get good grade”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It takes up time better spent listening to an instructor or working through a text book independently.”</td>
<td>“Easy to get off task, get distracted”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people, unfortunately, see group work as an &quot;easy A.&quot; They believe they can rely on the others in the group to do all the work. ... it makes it very difficult to find a time to meet when each member has several other groups to meet with also.</td>
<td>“You are not able to assess the work of each student”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Social loafing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Faculty: Reasons to use group work.

- Application/critical thinking: 7
- A different teaching method/variety: 6
- Learning concepts/from each other: 17
- More participation/interaction: 6
- Learning to work in groups/‘real life’...: 10
- Less grading/better quality projects: 2
- It’s mandated: 2
Results

Students: Why professors use group work.

- Lighter load for students: 89
- Easier for prof/less grading: 33
- Learning to work in groups/“real life”..: 28
- More student interaction/sharing of ideas: 27
- A different teaching method/variety: 11
- Don't know: 5
- Other: 12
- It's mandated: 2

Note: The chart shows the percentage of students who believe each reason is true.
**Students**

**Why do you think professors at GSU use group work?**

- “A mindset that "we will have to work in groups " when in the workforce where these problems will occur. However, freeloaders get fired in the workforce, everyone wants to go home, and we don’t divide my paycheck if I do all of the work.”
- “Because they don't want to lecture.”
- “To have less papers or assignments to grade.”
- “They feel obligated to do so.”
- “Haven't a clue. No one has ever said.”
- “Gggrrrrr”

**Faculty**

**Describe your thought process in choosing Group Work**

- “I use it to lighten my grading time by have a group assignment that takes less time to grade since I teach five class per semester. For its own sake, I like to give students a variety of structures and types of assignments so that if they do not connect with one type, perhaps they will benefit from another. Lastly, the assignments have critical thinking, interpersonal communication, technology utilization, and research outcomes that are user friendly in a group environment. The students can help each other develop these skills so the responsibility is not on me, the teacher, alone.”
Results

Faculty: Discouraging factors

- Class size/grading issues: 4
- Feeling out of control: 3
- Group dynamics issues: 8
- Ineffective/time consuming: 4
- Organizational issues: 3
- Prior bad experience: 2
- Students' dislike of GW/complaints: 6
- Other: 8
Results

Faculty: Encouraging factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class type</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain how it helps to learn</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More engagement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach about techniques</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not encourage</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- High levels of using group work in classes
- Faculty appear more positive about using it than students
- Faculty report more problems with it (many are structural)
- Faculty report more strategies for dealing with problems
- Fair amount of agreement between faculty and students on benefits
Caveats

• Relatively Small N
• Single Campus
• Exploratory/Descriptive Only
References


