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Citation:

Teamwork is at the heart of the WPI plan, and is one of the top skills sought by employers. Yet despite nearly 50 years of institutional experience with project work, many faculty still struggle to help student teams perform in equitable and productive ways. Professor Lisa Stoddard addressed this problem head-on, developing a suite of tools to help facilitate student team dynamics and performance.

Lisa's work builds on existing research in team dynamics in important ways. The tools she developed include a process for developing team agreements regarding goals, communication, division of work, and strategies to address problems. At the heart of the process is an asset or strengths-based approach to teaming, where students and teams identify their individual and collective assets. The skills for each aspect of the project are then identified and matched to team members' assets. Together this approach helps reduce the bias and stereotyping which can interfere with team performance.

Reflections from students who have used these tools indicate their value in promoting individual and teamwork skills. One student wrote: "Through creating my asset map, I surprised myself with what I may be able to offer in a team project." Another, "We use our different strengths to an advantage and identify our weaknesses as well, so we can gain experience."

A professor who introduced the tools to a project team commented: "Using Professor Stoddard's tools, they discovered each other's, and their own, strengths and weaknesses. From there, it became one of their goals to help each other develop in areas they wished to grow in and gave each more confidence."

Results from courses and projects in which these tools have been used indicate the approach reduces task assignment bias and promotes more equitable contributions and better group processes.

Given the pervasiveness of group work at WPI, and the importance of collaboration as a lifelong skill, giving students strategies to promote effective teamwork is a contribution that will reap dividends throughout their time at WPI, and in their professional and personal lives.

For her important work in support of effective and equitable team building, we are pleased to present Elisabeth (Lisa) Stoddard with the 2020 Romeo L. Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education.