

Helpful Hints for Team Work

Most IQP teams struggle early in the PQP---it's a big time commitment, the material is new, and the problem is ill defined. Lack of teamwork experience contributes greatly to inefficiency and frustration. That is quickly followed by poor quality work. Attention to teamwork skills, time management, learning style differences, and consensus building will help improve efficiency and productivity. That is quickly followed by high quality work. We will address several of these topics at various times during C and D terms.

Some of you may be aware of the Tuckerman description of group work: "forming, storming, norming, performing". If not, we suggest learning about it. Descriptions are readily available, for example:

<http://www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm>

<http://www.newalbany.tech.purdue.edu/ols/Courses/252/Chapter08.ppt>

<http://www.aucegypt.edu/faculty/gaafar/Senior%20Project/Teamwork.ppt>

A little "storming" is not a bad thing as long as the group works toward goal completion and does not become dysfunctional. Our job as advisors is to help you all get to the "performing" stage. Some interesting comments on team dynamics are available from the course web site, file:

Teams find it helpful to assign roles during a project. This engages everyone in the process and puts responsibility on each team member for various project activities. Here is one structure for assigning roles.

- *Designate a coordinator, recorder, a monitor, and a checker for each major project activity.* In teams of three, the same individual functions as monitor and checker. Rotate these roles throughout the term.
- *Agree on common meeting times and what each member should have done before the meeting by way of preparation.* At the end of every meeting, members should be clear on what their responsibilities are for the next meeting. Some meetings might be conducted electronically but face-to-face is really the best.
- Get a reference or guide for "how to conduct a productive meeting" and implement it.
- *Do the required individual preparation.* Each team member should do their best to complete their individual assignment prior to each meeting.
- *Coordinator checks with other team members before the meeting to remind them of when and where they will meet and what they are supposed to do.*
- *Meet and work.* The **coordinator** keeps everyone on task and makes sure everyone is involved, the **recorder** prepares any written material, the **monitor** makes sure everyone understands both the material and the solution strategy, and the **checker** checks the final draft for accuracy.

- *Note to monitors:* If you ask people if they understand something and they say yes, you've learned nothing. To check for understanding in a way that means something, ask for an explanation. If someone on a team appears unprepared or demonstrates lack of knowledge in a meeting with advisors and liaisons, the monitor has not done his/her job.
- *Group writing.* Group writing can be difficult and every group must find out what works best for them. The Writing Workshop is a great resource for help on how to best approach the group writing process. Please use them as much as possible.
- *Review returned report drafts, documents that have been critiqued, and each advisor-team meeting.* Make sure everyone understands what the feedback meant and how the group's work can be improved in the future. If you are all confused, get assistance or clarification immediately from those who supplied the feedback
- *Complete and submit peer-rating sheets for all team members when required.* Ratings will be collected near the end of each project. They will be used to provide feedback for team improvement and may be used to adjust grades for every student.

As you already know, group work isn't always easy: team members sometimes cannot prepare for or attend group sessions because of other responsibilities, and conflicts often result from differing skill levels and work ethics. When teams work and communicate well, however, the benefits more than compensate for the difficulties. It helps to understand your own strengths and weaknesses and how others complement those on your team.

One way to improve the chances that a team will work well is to agree beforehand on what everyone on the team expects from everyone else. Reaching this agreement is the goal of the second assignment in the Worcester PQP.

*adopted from R. Felder, North Carolina State University