How can we get students to work in teams in online courses?

INTER AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, PONCE CAMPUS
About

The University

• Private non profit institution founded in 1912, comprised of 9 campuses and 2 professional schools
• Online project started in 1994, Deanship in 2009, and Department in 2014
• 23 online academic programs, 14 staff members, and 30 faculty members

The Presenter

Rolando Méndez, CME / CSE is an:

- Academic Manager
- Communicator
- Educator
- Problem Solver
- Organizational Bricoleur
- Lifelong Learner

787.432.2149
rmendez@ponce.inter.edu
@rolypepe
Challenges in the Online Classroom

- Diversity
- Accessibility
- Adaptability
- Time management skills
- Information literacy skills
- Self motivation
- Social loafing
- Instructional Design
- Technical Issues
- Compliance / Integrity Issues

Influence

Engagement
Performance
Learning
Retention
Case Study

• **Online course**
  Human Behavior in Organizations [BADM 2650]

• **Students**
  Business Administration, Management, Human Resources Management, Operations Management, Other disciplines (Psychology, Health Sciences, Education)

• **Strategy**
  Virtual Teams (VTs) as tools for managing complexity, creating engagement, and promoting collaborative learning.

• **Results**
  The course's passing rate was 60%. 49% of students passed with a B or higher grade.
What We Need to Know

Team Life Cycle
1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Adjourning

Influencing Factors
- Structure
- Leadership
- Team/Task Mental Models
- Communication
Planning

① Purpose. Define the purpose of integrating VTs in the classroom.

② Structure. Decide:
   - Amount of teams to be created
   - Size of teams (4 to 6 members recommended)
   - How teams will be formed (automatic vs. self-enrollment)
   - Team leadership (designated vs. emergent)

③ Deliverables.
   - Plan and design deliverables
   - Establish timeframe for deliverables (mid/end of semester recommended)

④ Measurement. Decide how teams will be evaluated.
Implementing

① **Communicate.** Inform students about team activities in the course on the first day of class.

② **Understand.** Assess students’ task and team mental models via survey or discussion forum. This helps you understand students’ prior knowledge and experiences working in teams.

③ **Guide.** Help students:
   - Enroll in teams
   - Communicate and interact with each other
   - Understand expectations
   - Navigate forming, storming, and norming stages
Managing

1. **Facilitate.** Help students:
   - Build trust
   - Make decisions
   - Solve conflicts
   - Be accountable for individual and group performance
   - Collaborate asynchronously

2. **Observe** team processes and interactions.

3. **Clarify** doubts that may arise.

4. **Follow Up.** Remind students of expectations and due dates for deliverables.

5. **Evaluate** team performance.

6. **Ask** for student feedback.

7. **Integrate** student feedback into previous processes.
The Team Charter

- A team charter is a document for **clarifying direction** and establishing boundaries.
- Students have to complete the team charter during the **first four weeks** of the course.
- This activity constitutes the first team assignment.

Completing the team charter helps a team become more effective by:

- Creating a climate for cooperation
- Establishing trust and communication
- Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Identifying most suitable leadership style
Lessons Learned

1) The integration of teams in the online classroom requires understanding of VTs and their processes. One common mistake is assuming they work the same way as traditional teams.

2) Students tend to be reluctant to working in teams. They usually approach working in VTs the same way they would in traditional teams. Therein lie the problems and frustrations.

3) Team processes take longer in virtual settings, so do team dynamics such as establishing trust and communicating. Thus, establish reasonable time frames.

4) Deliverables should be phased. Initial deliverables help teams refine their processes and dynamics. Students become better team players when they learn about their learning processes as a team.
Lessons Learned

5) Reduce the complexity of working in virtuality. Integrate guides, instructions, and answers to frequently asked questions.

6) Dissuade social loafing by empowering teams (Team charter).

7) Communicate frequently.

8) Use templates to facilitate grading.

9) Give meaningful feedback.

10) Integrate feedback.
Student Feedback

“The team charter was the start to creating a good team.”

“In the end, the purpose is that we all benefit in some way from what each other can contribute to the team.”

“It is a great tool for establishing rules. It is also a good tool for knowing your teammates and their strengths, for assigning tasks.”

“It is an essential and fundamental piece for teams.”

“Is an excellent tool because – through a good structure and shared leadership – (the team) can share experiences, acquire knowledge, and take advantage of diversity. Strengths and weaknesses are defined and communication becomes clearer and more precise.”

“It is a guide that allows us to collaborate equitably as team members and work towards the same established goals.”
References


Session Evaluations Contest

- Download and open OLC Conferences mobile app
- Navigate to specific session to evaluate
- Click “Evaluate Session” at the bottom of session details screen
- Complete session evaluation*

*Each session evaluation completed (limited to one per session) = one contest entry

Five (5) $25 gift cards will be awarded to five (5) individuals
Must submit evals using the OLC Conferences mobile app or website