**Tips for Working in Class Group Projects**

**UCB SPH**

Ellie Schindelman

elliesch@gmail.com

January, 2015

**1. Set clear goals and expectations at the beginning**

Take some time at the outset to talk about what each student wants to accomplish until you can develop a group goal - and then work together to reach that goal.

* Is the group’s goal to just pass the assignment or to get an A? Those two goals require different levels of group work.
* Engage in a discussion of what “good enough” means to each group member. What is the level of quality in your work that each person prefers. Discuss your differences early on, rather than waiting for the end to discover that you each had something different in mind for what your final product should look like.
* If there are some team members who care more about the project than others, and want to work harder in order to create a higher quality product, then the team can decide if everyone is ok with people doing different amounts of work on the project.

2. **Get Acquainted**

* Spend some time getting to know each other professionally and personally; teams where members feel more connected to each other tend to have more successful team experiences and create better products
* Try to have a meeting in the beginning over coffee/tea and/or food

3. **Establish group guidelines and norms of behavior for the group at the start**

Here are some guidelines and norms that work well in groups; your group should decide on the guidelines you want to use.

* Direct and honest communication
* Active, respectful listening
* Step up/step back
* Both/And thinking
* Try on new ideas and perspectives
* Don’t let issues fester—deal with them when they arise
* Show up on time
* Consensus decision making (and decide what that means, and what processes you will use to make decisions)
* Respond to emails from group members within (12/24/48 hours?)
* Follow through on the commitments we make
* Hold regular check-ins about how the work and the group and each individual is doing (Include a formal group de-brief at the middle and end of project to assess what went well and what could be done better in the future)

4. **Set up Systems for making your team work:**

Rotate a “chair of the week” (or chair for 2 weeks) - responsible for:

* Scheduling, communications
* Preparing agendas for meetings
* Facilitating any group meetings that week
* Contact with any people outside your group that week (anything that is not already another group member’s responsibility)
* Troubleshoot challenges

Role of the facilitator at a meeting:

* Review the purpose, objectives and agenda for the meeting with the group
* Keep the discussion on track
* Be aware of time
* Seek input from all group members
* Summarize key points, conclusions and group decisions
* Revise agenda as needed
* Propose a process when decisions need to be made
* Make sure there is an action planning process at the end of the meeting
* Ask for a brief group meeting evaluation

Rotate roles of recorder and timekeeper each week as well

**5. Plan and schedule at the beginning of the project**

Graduate students often have important commitments other than school, including jobs and families. Many students also live quite a distance from UCB. This makes planning and scheduling group work very important.

* *Be honest and reasonable about time constraints*: ask everyone to share what they are dealing with during this time period – vacations, weddings, school theses deadlines, childcare, etc.
* Recognize that every group member is trying to balance other commitments and everyone in the group will have to make compromises.
* Set meeting times and deadlines at the outset so that group members can plan around them

**6. Be clear about the division of labor**

* Ask everyone to share what they would most like to do to contribute to the project (taking into account time constraint issues, eg, if it would be better to do most of your work at the beginning or end of the semester)
* Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses.
* A group project may not provide you with the best opportunity to learn new skills individually due to time constraints. Pairing up with someone in the group who is proficient in an area in which you are not provides an opportunity to learn a new skill without compromising the productivity of the group.
* Talk about language and presentation issues. This can be a difficult conversation to initiate from the perspective of the group member for whom English is the primary language. Having this discussion early on can remove tension within the group, especially once the project editing begins.
* Come to a group decision about balancing the desire to do the best possible paper/presentation and letting members of the group use the project to get experience
* Check in periodically about how each person is doing with her/his responsibilities and if anything needs to be changed

**7. Continuously assess how your team is doing and make course corrections; agree what will be done if the group is not working well together**

* Take 5 minutes at the end of each meeting to talk about how the group is doing – what is going well and what could be improved.
* Talk at the beginning of a project about how the group will deal with any problems that arise and then follow the agreed upon process.

**8. Faculty/GSI Involvement**

* Talk with the faculty and GSIs about what is expected of you; clarify the specifics of the assignment. Not knowing what is expected can make team decision making a more challenging process, especially if each member interprets the assignment a different way.
* Seek help from your GSI, faculty or others if issues arise, including:
	+ Differences about your goals for the project
	+ Difficulties in making team decisions
	+ Concerns that some team members are not contributing the way you had planned
	+ Disagreements about how to move forward with your project
	+ Disagreements about what “good enough” looks like for the end product
	+ Interpersonal conflicts
	+ Team members not showing up at meetings or not following through with commitments
	+ Poor team morale
	+ Concerns about academic integrity or ethical issues
	+ Difficulties working together with your organization