COLLEGE STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR A GROUP GRADING METHOD

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Abstract

One factor that could have a major impact on students' reaction to a group project is the manner in which the individual grade is determined. Unfortunately, very little is known about students' attitudes toward group grading systems. The purpose of this study is to determine college students' attitudes toward three distinctly different methods for determining an individual's grade on the group project. Two of the methods are commonly used: they are the Group Grade Method (GGM) (i.e., everyone on the team earns the same grade) and the Peer Evaluations Approach (PEA) (i.e., high or low peer evaluations are used to adjust a group member's grade upward or downward, respectively). The third method, the Segment Manager Method (SMM), is a relatively new group grading system (Dommeyer, 2012). It requires that the instructor divide the project into five- and ten-point segments, and each team member assumes primary responsibility for several of the segments such that the workload among the teammates is relatively equal. Each segment manager may enlist the help of the other teammates to complete the assigned segments. Once the project is complete, two grades are calculated: a "segment grade" that represents each individual's grade on his/her managed segments; and a "project grade" that represents the group's grade on the project. Each group member's project grade is then determined by calculating the weighted average of the individual's "segment grade" (80% weight) and "project grade" (20% weight).

A four-page, self-administered questionnaire was used to ask college students about their attitudes toward the GGM, PEA, and SMM. The questionnaire began by asking whether the respondent had ever worked on a group project in a college class, and those respondents who had not been exposed to a group project were eliminated from analysis. Those who had previous experience with one or more group projects were then asked to answer several questions about their last group project, e.g., their team size, the type of group grading system that was used, and whether they had to deal with any slackers. Next, the questionnaire informed the respondents that they would be asked questions about three group grading systems, and definitions for the three grading systems were provided to them.

The survey results revealed that students prefer a group grading procedure that assesses and rewards individual contributions on the project (either the PEA or SMM). Moreover, the study found that higher GPA students are more likely than lower GPA students to prefer a grading method that holds individuals accountable for their work.

Although students have a preference for group grading methods that focus on individual efforts – either the PEA or SMM – many professors continue to use the GGM. The popularity of this method is no doubt due to its simplicity – it is easy for professors to apply and easy for students to understand. But if professors want to appeal to their students, deter social loafing, and generate more accurate grades, they should use a group grading system that accounts for individual efforts. Future researchers might consider surveying professors to determine why some of them steadfastly utilize the GGM despite its limitations. Perhaps professors need to be educated on the advantages of using group grading methods that are more discriminating.

References Available upon Request