

**STUDENT GROUP PROJECT ASSESSMENT:
AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPING BETTER ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

In higher education, requiring students to work in a small group on a project has become a popular teaching method. This innovation offers students a chance to develop social skills, increase retention of knowledge, improve self-esteem, foster motivation and enhance the overall learning experience (Parr, 2007). Despite such good opportunities, group project learning does not always generate positive outcomes and the main concern is grading approaches toward each group member's potentially uneven contribution. To reduce these negative factors and increase student' motivation, instructors strive to find the best way to assess each member's performance as well as the group's overall performance in order to fairly allocate grades. This study investigates current group evaluation assessment approaches and students' perceptions toward the approaches in order to provide useful information for assessing group project evaluations.

Most research findings are consistent in that the peer evaluation assessment approach is the most effective (Topping 1998) among group assessment methods and many instructors use some form of peer assessment to identify individual contributions on group projects (Lejk & Wyvill, 2001). Several factors including the type of instrument and the extent to which the peer evaluation affects individual grades should be considered when applying a peer evaluation assessment. When an instructor applies an instrument to evaluate individual contributions to a group project, the instrument should assess and support the discrete attributes of fairness, productivity, satisfaction, motivation, and learning.

To identify the students' perspective, several focus groups were conducted. Participants expressed various concerns related to the effectiveness of peer evaluations, particularly acute when a group was

comprised primarily of friends. Participants also thought peer evaluations may provide a medium where personal differences could be vented. They revealed that multiple peer evaluations – on a regular basis - minimized the opportunities for free riding.

Based on previous research and focus group findings, this study suggests the following: First, holistic peer evaluation is better than category-based peer evaluation. To practice holistic peer evaluation, instructors should provide a detailed check list to help students evaluate objectively and fairly. Second, an undisclosed individual peer evaluation score in terms of fairness is better than an open evaluation. If an individual peer evaluation score will be disclosed, students may become pressured and mark a peer as an equal contributor because they do not want to have any personal conflict. Third, self-assessment should be included in peer evaluation. Without self-assessment, the basis of an evaluation can be biased. Fourth, multiple peer evaluations are better than a single evaluation during the duration of the project. Peer evaluations can be used not only for individual grading but also for encouraging a change in attitude for the participant who did not contribute to the group project actively in an earlier stage of the process.

This study suggests several important aspects that instructors should consider when applying a peer evaluation assessment. Besides other factors, providing a clear evaluation policy at the beginning of the semester consistent with the nature and complexity of the assignment is crucial for successful team project outcomes.

References Available on Request