

## Collaborative Learning: Enhancing Student Performance In A Basic Course In Marketing Communications.

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### ABSTRACT

Because important elements of marketing practice have shifted more heavily to team formats, marketing students may benefit from greater emphasis on collaborative or group learning, an approach widely employed across academe with substantial evidence of enhanced educational outcomes. More than 600 studies have been published thus far with encouraging results.

Three types of learning environments have been identified: individualistic, cooperative and competitive. In individualistic situations, student learning objectives and outcomes are unrelated to the achievements of their colleagues, as is the case with courses organized around preset, established grade criteria. Competitive environments result in outcomes that may be beneficial to some students, but detrimental to others. Curve graded courses are in this category. The collaborative approach is based on the premise that individual learning goals are more efficiently achieved when the learning goals of others in the group are also met.

Collaborative learning involves the use of small groups so that by working together, students enhance their own learning as well as that of their peers. It implies a significant level of interdependence such that students promote each others learning, hold each other personally accountable for shared assignments and develop interpersonal and group skills. Its foundation resides in each student's commitment to the success of the other members of his or her learning team.

A trial of the collaborative format was conducted in a section of a beginning course in marketing communications with promising results as compared to similar sections employing the lecture/discussion format.

Though the shift from lecture/discussion to the collaborative format at first appeared daunting, the transformation was relatively painless for both professor and students. The course reorganization

involved the following tasks: 1) reconsider the overall and weekly learning objectives; 2) translate these to weekly class assignments; 3) modify the character and length of the lecture materials; 4) establish policy concerning the groups (number, size, selection of members, group management); 5) develop measurement and incentive systems.

One of three sections of marketing communications was randomly chosen for the trial. Students were unaware of changes in the course organization until the first meeting. They were assigned to learning teams based on zip codes, then randomly within zip codes.

The course met twice each week for 75 minutes. The first meeting included an abbreviated version of the lecture material. During the second meeting, student teams discussed topics from the course outline with the assistance of discussion guides supplied at the beginning of the semester. Some cases were also assigned

During the discussion period, the instructor served as a consultant, visiting the student teams, raising questions, underscoring and clarifying as necessary. At the end of the discussion meeting, a student from each group was randomly selected to present his/her study guides for instructor evaluation; the resulting grade was then applied to the entire group.

Incentives included a ten-point bonus which was awarded to each team when all members scored at the "B" level or higher on the first midterm. Students with a "B" average on all work up to the last week of class were exempt from the comprehensive final examination.

Measures comparing team and lecture sections taken from essay midterm examination total scores and item analysis as well as formal student course evaluations support the team format.

For references and further information, please contact the author at the above address.