**FACDIS Pedagogy Workshop**

November 1-2, 2018

Here are a few examples of assignments built around cooperative positive interdependence. The list is not meant as recommendations, but rather as concrete manifestations that might inspire creativity.

1. **Entrance ticket**

When students enter the class, there are a couple of question prompts on the screen. Each student is given a half sheet of paper on which to write responses. When class officially starts they get 2 minutes to write.

Questions may ask something personal: What is one song on the soundtrack of your life? What is the craziest thing you’ve ever eaten? What is your favorite summer activity?

They may ask something related to the day’s reading assignment: What two things from the reading do you want to discuss today? How would you describe the author? Who would disagree with the author’s main argument?

They may ask something that will prime the pump for later discussions: How (not why) did you choose to come to Bridgewater? How powerful are you? When do you have power? Have you ever been completely powerless? Why do people choose to resist or stop following? Can you think of a time when you chose to resist? Did it work?

Students then gather into groups (sometimes base groups, sometimes informal groups) and share/discuss for 4 to 5 minutes. If the question is suitable, they write a group answer on a separate half sheet of paper.

Sometimes, if there is time or the question is key, the groups report to the larger group, but often the point is just to get them thinking and talking. Sometimes but not always, I collect both the individual and group sheets. The point is not the written answer but the group process, but for the sake of positive interdependence, sometimes I give participation points based on the answers on the sheet.

This same process can be replicated at any point during the class. Sometimes it is best as a way for students to pull together main points at the end of class.

1. **Group discussion leadership**

Each base group is responsible for leading class discussions twice during the semester. Students must gather at least a day before class and come up with a series of questions related to the reading assignment that they think will inspire conversation among their peers. They meet to sort through ideas and produce a single list of questions, ranked in order of importance.

They then come to my office and defend the questions. We talk about what makes a good discussion question. We discuss strategies for getting the class to participate in accordance with the standards and procedures for a good discussion established collectively by the class at the beginning of the semester (and updated periodically).

In class they are responsible for a good discussion. Discussion leadership is graded on teamwork, flow, participation and inclusivity of the dynamics they establish, not how many questions they get through or the particular contributions of their peers. Every member gets the same grade.

1. **Group oral exams**

About a week before the midterm and final, I distribute nine essay-type questions. I recommend that groups designate a “point person” for each question, but let them know that everyone is responsible for contributing to each answer and that these are only starting points for where discussion might lead. They must meet as a group before the exam and work through strategies for how to answer each question.

On exam day, I can begin with a randomly-selected question (although in practice I often let them choose the question they want to start with, to see the dynamics of how they choose). I evaluate their answers on their ability to build persuasive answers using multiple and explicit references to the readings and course materials. The exam, after all, is over how they can use course materials to build answers to questions.

All group members get the same grade for the oral part of the exam. There is also a more traditional individual written part using identification terms. Those grades are individual, although I could see a case where each member got the average of all group members’ grades. More palatable might be allowing them to take this part of the exam together for a collective grade.

1. **Group presentations of individual papers**

While students write individual research papers, they are grouped by common themes and group members have collective responsibility for the class presentation day of that theme. They have to figure out together how to present their topic through the research that each did individually. While paper grades are based on the individual’s paper, all group members get the same presentation grade.

**Handling the group grade dilemma**

The first line of defense against student complaints about group grading is that such projects mimic the kinds of projects they will encounter throughout their life after college, and they should treat the experience as one of those challenging things that makes a college education worthwhile. Evidence shows that students learn better by doing and by practicing what they learn with others. Some groups will always work better than others, but everyone benefits from learning to work with people with different values, beliefs and talents.

That said, I have also developed a procedure that allows for adjustments to individual grades for group projects carried out by larger groups. At the beginning of the semester, I distribute a group evaluation form and spend class time explaining how the system works. I am explicit about its purpose – to dissuade free riders. At the end of the semester, group members evaluate the contributions of their group project collaborators and that evaluation affects individual grades for those projects.

Each member of the group is given a pool of points to distribute to the other members of the group. The total of the pool is 2 points for each group member other than themselves, plus one bonus point. Members do not give themselves points, and they need not distribute all the points they have. If everyone did a fair share of the work, each member would get 2 points, and the evaluator has a bonus point to distribute to someone who did a bit extra or was the leader. Points are taken away from people who did not pull their weight and given to those who took up the slack.

I average each person’s scores and move the group-based portion of their class grade up or down based on the results. Because of the bonus point, more grades go up than down, but the threat of lower grades helps keep group members honest. It also gives angry group members an outlet for their frustrations. Averaging the grades almost always eliminates the effects of personal vendettas, and I do exercise some discretion based on my observations throughout the semester. This strategy only really works for larger groups.