THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

GROUP WORK AT UNI

And how to survive it!

Student Life - Counselling Support

Group work is often a source of conflict, tension and stress for students.

However, group work is a part of many University courses and can help individuals develop positive skills for other areas of life.

In your professional careers you may find yourself having to work in groups where you don't always get on with all group members, which can result in conflict (see brochure on *Dealing with Conflict* for further information).

Challenges of Group work

Many students fear that other group members will not do their share of work which will result in them having to do more. This is a big contributor to students feeling anxious and stressed when it comes to working in groups. Managing these feelings can also seem difficult at times.

Students can feel that group members are not pulling their weight and are concerned that individual contributions will not be recognised and assessed fairly.

Students are often worried about working in groups as they believe others will lower their grades. This can be the case if students have high expectations of themselves and project these expectations on to other group members. This is further challenging as students assumptions of other's work is often based on their own perceptions.

Often students have many competing demands outside of their study which make it very difficult for groups to organise convenient time to meet. Learning to juggle competing demands and to manage our time effectively is very important for successful group work.

Some strategies for effective group work:

- Ask group members to set clear expectations at the beginning of the task or project. Make sure they include guidelines regarding individual contributions to the group. For example:
    - Everyone will come to meetings prepared
    - We will encourage everyone to contribute to the discussion and generation of ideas

- Expectations will need to be reviewed over the course of the task or project. It can be a good idea to schedule in reviews of expectations throughout the task/project.

- As a group come up with a range of strategies that might be useful for dealing with situations where individuals are not pulling their weight.

- Be clear on task allocation. Setting clear expectations at the beginning of the task about who will do what and by when is a useful and helpful strategy in group work. Breaking things down into smaller, achievable tasks that are allocated among the group members is an effective tool for managing expectations of each other in regards to work loads and task completion.

- Student's expectations of others can make working in a group challenging. It can be easier if you discuss as a group what aspects you are interested in and what you are good at. Working to your strengths can assist groups to function better, and can improve engagement and result.

- Focus on what you can do. By focusing on what your task is and getting your work done, you are less likely to think and worry about what others are doing.

- If you do have concerns about others, consider talking to your group members or your supervisor for additional support.

Skills that students need to develop to promote effective group work:

- active and tolerant listening

- communication skills

- flexibility

- accountability

- respect for others' contributions

- participation

- giving and receiving constructive feedback

- patience

- managing disagreements

- motivation

- keeping deadlines

You can find lots of additional information on the web, by searching for 'group work', 'group presentations' or 'working in groups' for example.

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:
- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support
Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building
The University of Adelaide
Ph: +61 8 8313 5663
After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197

This pamphlet was written by Student Life Counselling Support.