Collaborative Learning Pedagogy Guide

**Defined:** Collaborative learning is based on the view that knowledge is a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on four principles:

- The learner or student is the primary focus of instruction.
- Interaction and "doing" are of primary importance.
- Working in groups is an important mode of learning.
- Structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning.

**NOTE:** EDGE activities can be simple or complex. Both are effective!

Collaborative learning can occur peer-to-peer or in larger groups. Peer learning, or peer instruction, is a type of collaborative learning that involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts, or find solutions to problems. This often occurs in a class session after students are introduced to course material through readings or videos before class, and / or through instructor lectures. Similar to the idea that two or three heads are better than one, many instructors have found that through peer instruction, students teach each other by addressing misunderstandings and clarifying misconceptions.

Collaborative learning can take a variety of forms, such as a quick active learning activity in class or more involved group projects that span the course of a semester.

**Examples:** Brainstorming, case studies, double-entry journal / paired annotations, dyadic essays, group reports, guided reciprocal peer questioning, jigsaw, learning community, online collaboration, position papers / structured academic controversies, problem-solving, teamwork, think-pair-share. (See Texas Collaborative for details).

**Best Practices:**

**General Strategies**
1. Plan for each stage of group work.
2. Carefully explain to your class how the groups will operate and how students will be graded.
3. Give students the skills they need to succeed in groups.
4. Consider written contracts.

**Designing Group Work**
1. Create group tasks that require interdependence.
2. Make the group work relevant.
3. Create assignments that fit students’ skills and abilities.
4. Assign group tasks that allow for a fair division of labor.
5. Set up “competitions” among groups.
6. Consider offering group test taking.

**Organizing Learning Groups**
1. Decide how the groups will be formed.
2. Be conscious of group size.
3. Keep groups together.
4. Help groups plan how to proceed.
5. Regularly check in with the groups.
6. Provide mechanisms for groups to deal with uncooperative members.
Evaluating Group Work
1. Ensure that individual student performance is assessed and that the groups know how their members are doing.
2. Give students an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their group.
3. Decide how to grade members of the group.

Web Resources:
Texas Collaborative for Teaching Excellence:
http://www.texascollaborative.org/Collaborative_Learning_Module.htm

Wisconsin Center for Education and Research:
http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cl1/CL/doingcl/DCL1.asp

Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/clgt_bestpractices

QEP Initiatives as an Entry Point to Collaborative Learning

Days of Service:
• Description: The QEP Office organizes four college-wide days of service each academic year: 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance (September), Make a Difference Day (October), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service (January), and Global Youth Service Day (April). On these days, GPC partners with community-based organizations near GPC campuses, and students serve their communities to meet community-identified needs.
• Example: Students collaboratively work on a Day of Service project and then complete an individual or collaborative assignment connected to their service experience. Likewise, students may work individually on a Day of Service project and then complete a collaborative assignment connected to their service.

GPC Reads:
• Description: GPC Reads is a college-wide, interdisciplinary reading club that engages faculty, staff, and students in reading books by regional authors, provides opportunities for these authors to visit campus and engage with the GPC community, and coordinates co-curricular learning opportunities focused on themes explored in the selected books.
• Example: Students read the GPC Reads selection and then complete a collaborative assignment connected to the readings.

Democracy Commitment:
• Description: The Democracy Commitment (TDC) is a national initiative providing a platform for the development and expansion of community college programs, projects, and curricula that engage students in civic learning and democratic practice.
• Example: Students collaboratively work on a project that challenges them to think about and/or engage with democratic principles and practice.

Bridging Cultures:
• Description: Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation is a national initiative supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). At GPC, the project seeks to facilitate the study and application of civic engagement and democratic thinking regardless of citizenship and to broaden the perception and understanding of what it means to be a global citizen.
• Example: Students collaboratively work on a project that challenges them to think about and/or act on concepts of civic engagement, democratic thinking, and/or global citizenship.

For more information about Collaborative Learning or utilizing QEP initiatives as an entry point to Collaborative Learning, please contact Sean Brumfield (sean.brumfield@gpc.edu, 678-891-2305) or Mary Elizabeth Tyler Boucebc (maryelizabeth.tylerboucebci@gpc.edu, 678-891-3174).