Online Appendix for

Teamwork within a Senior Capstone Course: Implementation and Assessment

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Course changes over time

This course, required for all International Relations and Political Science majors, has been offered each semester since being added to the curriculum in the Fall 2017 semester; about 80 students take the course each academic year. Although the submission of a group project at the end of the term has always been a central part of the course design, we have modified several aspects of the project over the years to better facilitate collaborative teamwork processes. In our original course design, teams were formed after four weeks of coursework, and team collaboration was limited to the end-of-semester group project. Students were also required to complete several other individual assignments throughout the semester. However, we noted this design fell short in incentivizing students to collaborate with their teammates in preparing their final projects, encouraging students to divide project-related tasks among themselves for work on an individual basis instead of as a fully functioning team. Moreover, in our original design, the group project was not sufficiently connected to course materials, including other assignments, hence falling short of conveying the message that project teams are expected to communicate and work together throughout the semester.

Team Creation
Over the ensuing semesters, the faculty team instituted changes based on our and our teaching assistants' observations regarding team dynamics during in-class activities, the poster session, conversations with students, and student evaluations. One of the first changes was moving team creation to one of the first tasks of the semester, i.e., occurring within the first two weeks. Notably, students in this course are not allowed to fully choose their teams; project teams are formed semi-randomly. Group size varied from semester to semester, depending on the number of students, but generally consists of 4-5 students. Students are asked to confidentially indicate a few classmates they want to work with and a few they cannot work with; these preferences are considered in creating teams, with slightly more emphasis on avoiding teams with members antipathetic to one another. In creating these semi-random team assignments, the goal was to help students become more accustomed to working with those outside their immediate friend groups while minimizing the potential for a friends-only group or intractable conflict between team members.

Assignments

Next, we sought to make the final project topic selection more a matter of team focus by not only allowing students to formulate their own topics but also by changing the nature of course assignments leading to the final project. Initially, there was no graded group project proposal. However, we decided that making them work together almost immediately on an assignment they had to submit together would highlight the importance of teamwork and contribute to final project quality. Thus, now, the first real assignment of the semester is to write a group proposal where each team, following meetings with us, shares their project topic and justifies its relevance to political science.

In designing this course, we wanted to avoid having the final grade based solely on a single project or active in-class participation. Thus, we initially assigned two individual papers in the form of reflections and critiques of class-related material. Over time, we decided these individual assignments could be better connected to the final project. The first individual paper now focuses on collecting data for the project (based on job divisions outlined in the proposal). The second then situates the project topic within the wider academic literature. These changes resulted in group members communicating with each other about the project much earlier in the semester and continuing to communicate both inside and outside of class meetings throughout.

Poster Session

In the second semester, we introduced a project poster session open to everyone at the university. It is timed about two weeks before students submit the final group project. This has served multiple purposes, not only ensuring students receive feedback from multiple perspectives prior to submitting the final project but also allowing students to gain experience with poster preparation and presentation, which are valuable soft skills. Moreover, groups have to prepare for the poster session together. From our perspective, this change has also helped us evaluate group presentation skills, e.g., repetitiveness, division of tasks, etc. In collaboration with various bodies at the university, we set aside time for these entities to provide trainings in poster preparation and data visualization techniques to equip teams with the skills necessary to successfully complete and communicate their projects.

Team Emphasis in all Aspects of Senior Capstone Coursework

Over the years, our original course design has evolved in such a way that students are expected to work with their teammates outside of the classroom as well as during various in-class activities. These in-class activities are important; while 75% of students' final grade comes from the project (15% for the initial group project proposal, 30% for two project related individual papers, and 30% for the final project), 25% of the grade comes from active in-class participation. During class sessions, teams are occasionally asked to present that week's case or debate a case from the perspective of various actors. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic during the Spring 2020 semester, we moved from in-person to online sessions halfway through the term and conducted the course fully online during Fall 2020. During online learning, we had synchronous live sessions where students engaged each other in case discussions. Student teams were also given time to work with each other during class through pre-assigned Zoom breakout rooms and encouraged to hold meetings outside of class through self-identified

teamwork management and communication applications. While the group project requirement was retained from past semesters, the poster session component moved online. Each team pre-recorded their presentation, which was watched by faculty members and teaching assistants before live Q&A sessions. Virtual presentations were also uploaded to Blackboard, and every student was required to provide feedback on at least one presentation to facilitate peer-to-peer learning.