

PLS 15: Lab Handout Group Work Resources and Group Process Assignment

Introduction

You may have been involved with group projects in classes in the past. These experiences may have been positive or, perhaps, frustrating and inefficient. Group projects are becoming very common in the professional world and being able to work effectively on collaborative projects is becoming increasingly important skill to possess. Two major lab activities (Pest Management and Sustainability Criteria Rubric) and one minor one (Crops) in this course are designed, in part, to help you improve your skills, effectiveness and success when working in groups. Each student will be part of a lab group of about 5 students that will work together on these lab activities together during the quarter.

This handout contains a guidelines and information to help you create effective collaborative groups. The last page has four questions regarding the process your group will use in organizing itself and getting its work done. As a group, you should write out answers to the questions on the last page and turn them in to the TA by the end of lab on Week 3. This questionnaire will be returned to you within a few days and can be used as a guide throughout the quarter.

Factors that Help Make Groups More Effective

Below are some factors that can contribute positively to the success of a group.

- **Assigned Roles.** While everyone is equally responsible for the success of a group, dividing up the responsibilities of the group can help distribute the work and get it done more efficiently. Later in this document we outline the responsibilities of different roles that can be created in a group, such as a facilitator, a note-taker, an assignment coordinator, a spokesperson and document preparer. Each group needs to organize itself so that each member plays a different role in Pest Management exercise than the one s/he plays in Sustainability Criteria Rubric exercise. More information on these roles is below.
- **Meeting structure.** You should have an agenda for each meeting so everyone knows what will be covered and what needs to be accomplished. The facilitator and assignment coordinator should work together to create a draft agenda for each meeting, and solicit input from the all group members for the agenda, if not before, then at least at the beginning of the meeting.
- **Group Communication & Document Sharing.** We expect that your groups will mainly use e-mail and phones for communicating outside of face-to-face meetings. However, particularly for the Sustainability Criteria Rubric, it is very likely that you will be editing documents outside of your scheduled meetings. You should devise a method for keeping everyone up to date in the drafts of your work, and make sure everyone has access to these drafts. Options for this purpose include: using track changes in word documents that you exchange by email; keeping such documents in a folder on UC Davis Smartsite; and, using googledocs for shared editing. Information on each of these can be found later in this document. The TA can provide information to assist you if you are interested in setting up listserv, wiki, or other method of communication.
- **Shared understanding of the assignment.** Before getting started on an assignment, a group should first make sure that its members share a common interpretation of the assignment. This step helps ensure that there is a general consensus around the definition of the assignment or problem and the worthwhile actions that will be applied to address the problem.

Group Process Guidelines that All Members Should Follow

In order to create a productive group, it is important for each individual in the group to commit to some

principles of collaboration. Below are some helpful principles for each individual in the group to follow¹:

General Participation:

- Do your fair share of the work and complete it on time.
- Show up to meetings on time and ready to work
- Keep others informed if you have difficulty making a meeting
- Be flexible

Using meeting times efficiently:

- Offer to do your share of group tasks between meetings (and do them).
- Try to help the group to redefine the task or problem when things get confused.
- When needed, try to pull together and restate the different ideas presented.
- Check that everyone understood the issue or proposed solution.

Communication at meetings:

Each member of the group should agree to follow the course *Ground Rules* for communication at meetings and in other interactions with group members. These are:

- Respect individuals, their perspectives and opinions. Communicate and behave in ways that demonstrate this respect.
- Be aware of the differences between factual information, your opinion and your feelings – and those of others.
- Emphasize statements beginning with “I think” or “I believe” or “I feel” to introduce your views when faced with others’ conflicting perspectives or claims.
- Speak your mind about issues that are important to you. They likely will remain important to you even if you try to ignore them.
- Recognize that a person’s position or opinion is not the person. Don’t personalize disagreements.
- Strive to participate fully, neither dominating nor withdrawing, in meetings and discussions.
- Be understanding when others feel a need to be silent.

In addition, the following guidelines can help if you are having difficulty reaching agreement on something:

- When there are conflicting positions, try to find areas of agreement within the positions (e.g., “I think we agree on A, B, and C”).
- Try to address disagreements directly (“How could we change our solution so you could support it?”).

Organizing your Group and Assigning Roles within It

There are many ways to organize a group to distribute the work. We suggest using the five roles that are outlined below. However, you are free to choose to organize your group in a way that is different from the one outlined below. If your group chooses to do this, there are three requirements: 1. all of the tasks and responsibilities listed below must be assigned to someone in the group; 2. everyone in the group agrees to the organizational outline and roles; and, 3. a written outline, including the responsibilities of each role, is submitted at the end of lab on Week 3.

¹ Middendorf, Joan. “Group Skills Development Pledge.” Campus Instructional Consulting, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1997. <http://www.indiana.edu/~teaching/allabout/faq/leading.shtml> accessed 3/3/09.

Regardless of the organizational outline for your group, the group needs to assign roles in a way that each member plays a different role in Pest Management exercise than the one s/he plays in Sustainability Indicators Rubric exercise. The suggested roles for your group are:

Facilitator²:

- Make sure that the group's goals and objectives get defined (Goals should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timed. Objectives are actions that achieve goals).
- Create an agenda for each meeting with the assignment coordinator.
- Actively solicit ideas from every group member at the start of the meeting (and possibly before)
- Try to move the group towards consensus. Make sure decisions are clearly understood by all.
- Bring the discussion to a definite close. Make sure assignments and action items are clear understood by all.

Note-Taker:

- Responsible for recording as accurately as possible the important ideas that are discussed (this doesn't need to be as detailed as recording the minutes of a meeting).
- Record questions that the group needs to have answered (either by the group or by the instructor)
- Record decisions that have been made, agreements that have been reached, assignments and action items.
- Help make sure that the group stays on track during the course of meetings
- Keep track of group decisions as the quarter progresses.

Assignment Coordinator:

- Remind the group of upcoming deadlines and make sure all group members are completing their work on time
- Confirm that each task and project has a member assigned to it,
- Help create agenda for meetings

Document Preparer:

- Finalize and format all *group* documents and assignments and ensure they are turned in on time.
- Keep track of different versions of the assignment and the different individuals' contributions to group assignments.

Spokesperson:

- Organize main talking points for updates on group progress and large group discussions
- Give updates to the class and instructor on behalf of the rest of the group

Resources for Sharing Work in a Group

E-mail: probably the most common way to share work is by e-mailing documents back and forth amongst the group. But you may encounter difficulties when multiple people edit the same document at the same time, leaving you with multiple versions of a document you must reconcile into one.

Smartsite: Your group can create a *resources folder* on Smartsite to store your work. You can save different versions of documents within this folder, and you will all have equal access to the site and documents. Your documents will, however, also be accessible to the rest of the class. If you have trouble with this, you may consider another option.

² Connery, Brian A. and John Vohs. "Group Work and Collaborative Writing." Davis Honors Challenge. <http://dhc.ucdavis.edu/vohs/index.html>. Accessed 3/3/09.

Googledocs: Because each of your group members has a Google account (your UC Davis e-mail is a Google account), you can share documents through Google docs. Here is information from Google about the googledocs functions (more information can be found directly from Google):

Create and edit docs: To get started, go to <http://docs.google.com> and click on the New button (upper left), then create a document, spreadsheet, presentation or form. Start from scratch, upload an existing doc to edit or share online, or use a template.

Access docs from anywhere: Because your docs are stored securely online, you can access them from anywhere, from any computer with an Internet connection and a standard browser. And it's easy to export or download your docs in a variety of formats, including HTML, PDF, CSV and others – just open your doc and select File > Download file as.

Collaborate with others: Use the Share button (either from the Docs homepage or when editing a document) to invite others to edit your docs online. You can all view and make changes to the same docs online.

PLS 15: Group Process Assignment

Each student should fill out this page and keep it in their lab notebook.

The group as a whole should turn in one copy of this page at the end of Week 3 Lab

Lab Section (M or R): _____

Group Members' Names: _____

Spend about 5 minutes discussing each question.

1. Once you are in your groups, spend some time learning about each other and exchange contact information. In addition, ask and answer the following questions:

- Who has been involved in a team project?
- Were those experiences positive, or not?
- Has anyone helped facilitate meetings before?
- What lessons have been learned from these experiences that might make this a better group process?

2. When is a convenient time for you to meet regularly as a group (you will likely need to meet weekly to work on either the sustainability indicators or pest management project)? Even if you don't always meet at these times, it is important to share schedules and find times when you are likely all available. If scheduling meetings is difficult, you can use the online scheduling tool www.doodle.com to help figure it out. This is easy to use and can be quite helpful.

3. How do you plan to share your work with each other for editing? Email? Google Docs? Smartsite? Another method? (see earlier in the document for more info on these options)

4. As a group, decide who will play which role in the Pest Management and the Sustainability Rubric exercises and fill in the following table. Remember that a member can not play the same role in the two different exercises.

<u>Role</u>	<u>Pest Management</u>	<u>Sustainability Criteria Rubric</u>
-------------	------------------------	---------------------------------------

Facilitator

Note taker

Assignment
Coordinator

Spokesperson

Document
Preparer