



Individual Performance Assessment in Large Group Projects



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What kinds of large-scale group projects do you use in your teaching?

I have been working primarily in a marketing research class where we do projects for local small businesses and other organizations and classes run about 60 people for a 4000 level class. That is a fairly large class in terms of having only team-based projects as the sole mechanism for grading. This semester we are running a single company as a product activity, but in the past we have run up to 12

different companies in one semester for local businesses with each team working for someone different. That means around six people are on each team.

How long have you used LINKS?

We are just going to be starting to use LINKS simulation this coming spring semester. We are excited about using computer simulations like LINKS. I have done other courses where we use other simulations but we use the same performance assessments and evaluations in all of our circumstances.

What is your average class size?

I have never had a class under 45 students. The average is between 45 and 60.

How and why do you assess individual performance?

The why is easy—when classes are big, and teams are large too, there tends to be a chance for social loafing, where students just coast on the hard work of others. I try to set some expectations: that everybody's input matters and we want to reward the students that work really hard. We

want the students who aren't working so hard to know it's noticed, it matters and it affects people around them. Their high-school training was generally education that focussed on a single-person effort and work is very often a team-effort, so students need to learn to bridge that gap.

And as to how I do it—I have the students keep a meeting log where they note attendance and responsibility. Every time a team meets, they log who was there, who was excused, who did not even show up, what people were responsible for bringing to the meeting, and did they do it? And they also note what was assigned for next time. They've got a track record, and I can call a team anytime and ask to see those logs, and they are all turned in at the end of the semester.

We couple that with a peer evaluation that we give both at the mid-point of the semester and after the project has been turned in. We ask each student to allocate 100 points to their other team members, excluding themselves. When everybody has participated everyone gets equal scores and they end up with 100% participation. It's a nice even system.

When it is uneven, unequal participation, you see some students with a score above 100. That means they have done a larger amount of work and their colleagues recognize that. And those who have not done the work their scores are lower and they get docked. I can see what the spread of effort was from the team themselves. We then use those reports to scale part of their project score. It is helpful to see what their perceptions of work effort are coupled with their documentation of what people were assigned and then I feel pretty confident of scaling somebody and using it in their grading.



We do both mid-project and post-project evaluations—they submit a peer evaluation at the point when their first major draft submissions is due. I can see the draft and the meeting logs they keep throughout the semester. I can see which people are working. We do feedback and have group meetings at that time. I have a meeting with the entire team to follow up on class points which gives me a chance to check in and keep up on key points and make sure that people are still working. When they submit their final paper we have them do a final peer evaluation. I can ask for those logs whenever I need to see them. It may show that if the team has had ten meetings and one person has missed eight of them, that's a big example of non-participation in the team effort.

Do you see any major differences between simulation-team group projects and other kinds of group projects (major course papers, client/company-based projects, etc.)?

In a lot of cases they are fairly similar. Students need to learn how to adjust their learning styles to one another, how to adjust their work styles to each another and how to be responsible to other human beings in a way that they mostly haven't before.

In terms of simulations, I think the challenge is that a lot of the activity is right around the computer. You don't get the same ability to individually go out and get the research and come back. It is a more self-contained experience. The challenge that this will pose for people is the need to see and monitor this group interaction as opposed to be able to run out and say "Kris you need to go work on this and Jen go work on that." So one of the big differences is the constraint of the way a simulation functions. It has very little outside information. It is a new challenge that way.

From a social aspect and a learning aspect, I think they are very similar. If you are in an environment where you know what your expectation is—like "we are going to document how you interact, we are going to document when you do your simulations." Then you can chart them and you can still get that individual performance that you need, but it requires the instructor to be aware of it. And to really think about how they want to assess individual performance beforehand. But socially it is very similar in terms of learning and interaction at the student level. It presents some challenges more for the instructor than for the students in terms of documenting how those performances take place.

How do you normally set up your teams? Do you have a random process or do you ask the students for input?

I use a combination. I have an information period where students can tell me about interactions they have had and then it's random. We name our teams by the end of the second week of classes so students get roughly one week to give me feedback. If there is somebody they absolutely do or do not want to work with, they can let me know, and I will take that into consideration. I don't guarantee it. I try to accommodate the pairings that may not work, because usually there is a reason, like they have been together on a team before. So, I try to accommodate those requests when I get them. Most of my students are the same couple of majors—they are business administration, marketing or international business majors, so I try to divvy them out a bit when I can

What year are most of the students.

Most are juniors and seniors. The regular class is probably a 50/50 mix.

What do you hope to accomplish with your first LINKS simulation?

I am excited for the chance to get that immediate feedback on a decision. We mostly work with client projects and local small businesses. We spend a whole semester on a project and it could take months to find out whether something has been implemented and how it works. I want to see the students put their strategies in place and then quickly get to see the results.