



The Professor's Column

Two-Person LINKS Teams at Georgia Southern University



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Let's start with the facts: LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation [Extended Edition], 58 students, and 29 teams.

We know what many of you are thinking. Are you crazy? Why would you run LINKS SCM, especially the Extended Edition, using two-person teams?

GSU started using LINKS years ago in our capstone Seminar class in logistics and intermodal transportation. In those early years, student teams



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consisted of four, and sometimes five, people in each group. While that worked well, one big issue surfaced and remained. Some students “skated” while others did all the work. How do you solve that problem?

We addressed the problem in two ways. First, we set up 20-minute Instructor Review Meetings with each team. We scheduled these meetings usually after the 4th of 8 or 9 decisions. During these meetings, we asked the teams to answer several questions based on that team's experience in LINKS. In a surprisingly short amount of time, those students who were actually playing the game were identified and those who were hanging on were, too. The questions asked were not difficult. Any student playing the game for 4 weeks surely would be able to explain how their team forecasted demand, for example.

These Instructor Review Meetings were very helpful in identifying who was not really participating. But, the time required and the inevitable scheduling conflicts made the Instructor Review Meetings almost unmanageable. The real problem with the Instructor Review Meetings was that while the skaters could be easily identified, there was no way to guarantee an increase in effort or participation.

The next step was to allow team members to evaluate each other's performance. These anonymous rankings directly impacted student grades. While this worked to identify many students who were not

working to their potential, it was still subjective. Students have a hard time fairly evaluating the performance of their friends. And, learning was not achieved; they just earned a lower grade.

At this point, we decided to try teams of two students. This way, everyone had work to do; it became hard to hide. Students, who might otherwise end up shouldering the lions' share of the LINKS duties, are quicker to exhort their teammates to participate and to report severe apathy situations in time for intervention. The same two students also work on a research project together. This way, they can meet and discuss LINKS, as well as their research project. We still ask each student to evaluate his or her teammate.

This semester will test this method more than ever. 29 teams is a lot to manage. But so far the two-person teams have worked for us.

We'd like to offer a suggestion for instructors who choose to move to smaller teams. Students ask every semester to be allowed to choose their teammates. In our case, we select the teams ourselves. During the first week of class, a student may request a change of a teammate, provided that all students agree. Changing teammates is done in rare circumstances.

How do we pick teams? We found that stratifying students by their GPA (or, their GPA over the last few semesters) puts students in a similar peer group. For instance, students with a GPA of 3.5 have demonstrated a work ethic that is different than those students with a GPA of 2.2. We know this is not always the case. It does seem to be generally true in our experience.

The results? Overall, we have fewer team issues than when we first started. Students grasp LINKS more fully, and enjoy the learning experience. Teams become highly competitive, and many are disappointed when LINKS ends, as they have ideas on how to improve their performance.

Then again, perhaps they are disappointed with the end of LINKS because they have to focus on the lectures?



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