Innovative Ways to Prevent Conflict in Student Groups

Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.
-- Ronald Reagan

Student Group Work Conflict video (5:51)

Do your semester group projects frequently result with unmanageable student conflict? Have you already tried consequence-oriented strategies (e.g., group grade, peer evaluations to reduce grades, threats to fire a group member or professor intervention) without success? Consider these preventative strategies:

- Start the first day of class with an icebreaker prompt allowing students to "vent" past negative group work experiences (e.g., before students are grouped, ask "what has been your experience with group work and what should group members do to make it a positive experience?"); this creates a common bond, actually decreasing their anxiety and increasing motivation.
- Give students a conflict styles inventory to learn more about their communication tendency.
- Ask groups to create an action plan or contract for **when** conflicts occur.
- Use class time to introduce conflict case studies; ask students to brainstorm multiple ways to respond.

All of our students will one day be on a job interview and asked, "tell me about a past conflict and how did you handle it." Instead of being frustrated with their student group conflicts today, help them create a rock-star response that lands them a job.

Resources

Huang, L.S. (2014). Students riding on coattails during group work? Five simple ideas to try. *Faculty Focus*, September, 29. http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/students-riding-coattails-group-work-five-simple-ideas-try/

Weimer, M. (2010). Group work recommendations. *Faculty Focus*, June 1. http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/group-work-recommendations/

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