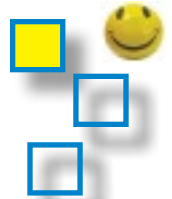


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What Happens When Students Study Together?

I'M A STRONG BELIEVER in the benefits of students studying together, even though students don't always understand or even experience the benefits. Oftentimes the potential gains of group study sessions are compromised by student behaviors. Students will saunter into study sessions, mostly not on time, sit around, check their phones, and socialize. When they finally start reviewing their notes, the text, or the homework problems, it's all pretty superficial. There are very few questions, explanations, or confessions of confusion. The most intense conversation takes place over what they've heard from others about the exam and their hopes that it will be easy.

If students studied more seriously, many (actually I think it's most) of them would benefit enormously from study groups. Working with others provides a safe place to ask questions and admit confusion. Often it's easier for students to understand each other than the teacher. When students figure out things on their own, that builds confidence. And when students explain things to each other, the student doing the explaining comes to a deeper understanding.

What students need when they study together is guidance. But who among us has time to organize and manage study groups? I've been trying to think of some efficient ways teachers can improve how students study together. Your help with the list of options would be appreciated.

Encourage collaboration

- Make the case for study groups. Explain to your students why and how study groups improve exam performance for most students.
- Demonstrate the benefits by using groups during in-class review. See the list of activities below for ideas.
- Let students form the groups and figure out the logistics: who, how many, and

meeting times, including frequency and length. One study buddy is better than none.

- Offer to connect students who'd like to study with others.
- Emphasize studying together as part of exam preparation for one exam, challenging students to see if getting together as a group helps them learn.

Activities students can do when they study together

- Generate potential exam questions or problems. Each group member works with a chunk of content, preparing possible test questions or problems the group uses to test their knowledge and understanding.
- Facilitate discussion of notes. Each group member is responsible for one or more class session(s). That person then leads the group's discussion of the designated content, identifies what's most important, where there's related material in the text, and how that content fits with other material that's been covered.
- Prepare study guides. Each group member takes a section of text and prepares review materials for the rest of the group.
- "Grade" answers. Provide groups with the responses to sample essay questions and let students grade them. Their discussion can help generate a grading criteria for essay answers.
- Determine what's likely to be on the test. The group constructs a list of content areas, concepts, or details that everyone in the group agrees they'll need to know for the exam.

Offer guidelines that make study sessions productive

- Members arrive on time; the session starts and ends on time.

- Students get together regularly for shorter sessions rather than for one marathon study session before a big exam.
- Make an agenda; members decide beforehand what the group will be doing.
- Group members come prepared. Everyone is expected to contribute. Those who don't contribute are constructively confronted.
- The group doesn't waste time. Socializing, checking phones, and other disruptive actions are kept to a minimum. It's about the content.
- Members treat each other with respect; no one is demeaned when they are confused or have trouble understanding a concept even after it's been explained.
- There's a spirit of sharing. People help each other.
- Members do what the group needs. If the discussion is off track, someone gets

see GROUPS, Page 2

Mid-Term Week - October 3-7
Last Day to Withdraw - October 14
Spring Registration Begins
Continuing Students - October 31

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First Monday of the Month

September 6	March 6
October 3	April 3
November 7	May 1
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January 9	July 3
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A Dose of Reality for First-Year Students and How We Can Help

BY THE THIRD OR fourth week of most courses, students have had a reality check. They have taken the first exam, received feedback on their first paper, or otherwise discovered that the course isn't quite what they had expected or hoped it would be. Here are a few reminders as to what many beginning students and some others might be thinking at this point in the semester.

Those who begin college right after high school have been told by everybody that college is going to be harder than high school and they'll have to study more. Most of these students accept what they've been told. The trouble is that's where their thinking basically stops. They don't consider what's going to be harder or how much more studying will be required.

One thing students experience in college is having a lot more freedom than they had in high school, and this freedom extends to their courses. Large classes that make it easy to be anonymous. No exams for the first few weeks. Reading assignments other students say you don't need to do until just before the exam. Early on, many courses don't look or feel harder than high school. And when personal lives fill with work, sports, new friends, and sometimes different living arrangements, the distractions are many.

And then there's how well many students did in high school with limited studying or studying that was wholly teacher guided. By the time an exam rolled around, the student was prepared, knew what to expect, and did well. So even though students expect things to be harder in college, it's easy for them to persuade themselves they can handle it. What they did in high school worked, so they'll just do a bit more of the same in college, and everything will be okay.

Another characteristic of many students is their inability to recognize when they do and don't understand something. When they read their textbooks, they settle in by first selecting the music and snacks that will accompany their studying. Then, with loud music filling their ears, their eyes scan the words and their highlighters move across the pages until they reach the end of the assignment. Students go over their notes by rereading them or, if they're really conscientious, recopying or typing them. As they review their notes, what they see on the

page starts to look familiar, and they equate this familiarity with knowledge. Frequently, students come to exams thinking themselves prepared and believing they've studied enough only to discover that they can't do the problems or answer the questions.

Additionally, there's the reluctance of students to change their approaches. When asked what they plan to do differently for the next exam, students often respond that they'll do what they did for the previous one, only they'll do it more. Dembo and Seli's research shows that even after successfully completing developmental courses that teach learning strategies, students didn't change their approaches. Finally, and even more fundamentally, strategies may be known and understood, but unless they're applied, they're worthless.

Those are the experiences and thoughts of many of our students at this moment. The question is, what can we do about it? I'm guessing that readers of this blog identify with student struggles and want to respond constructively. Here are some options; you're welcome to expand the list:

- Be sure that the first graded activity occurs early in the course, and design the assignment sequence so there's a way for students to recover from dismal results on the first test or assignment.
- Consider authentic assignments like the one described in the October issue of the Teaching Professor newsletter where students engage in a number of activities that require them to use effective test preparation strategies. I've listed the reference in case you want to take a look now. Less elaborate options are also available: discuss exam review strategies with the class, give students a few minutes to write down their study plans, and then have them revisit and revise those during the exam debriefing.
- Let students deliver the "how to succeed in this course" messages. On the course website, post comments from former students who can provide effective strategies and approaches. Ask current students to identify study strategies that they do and don't recommend. List these and share them with the class.
- Talk about learning strategies in contexts larger than the course. This isn't just about what's needed to do well in this

course. It's about learning strategies for life.

- Let students know that you believe they can do what needs to be done.

References:

Dembo, M. H. and Seli, H. P., (2004). Students' resistance to change in learning strategies courses. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 27 (3), 2-10.

Steiner, H. H., (2016). The strategy project: Promoting self-regulated learning through an authentic assignment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28 (2), 271-282.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; A Dose of Reality for First-Year Students and How We can Help; Faculty Focus; September 14, 2016; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/a-dose-of-reality-for-first-year-students-how-we-can-help/>] September 20, 2016.

GROUPS

Continued from Page 1

the group back on task. If someone is not contributing, their participation is invited.

Provide possible incentives

- If everyone in the group scores above a certain level, everyone in the groups receives a designated number of points.
- Make study group participation an optional, extra-credit assignment. Groups must register with you and report on their sessions (who was there, what they did), and each member writes a short paper after the exam, reflecting on his or her experience. If all that happens, it counts as an assignment.
- Groups may submit potential exam questions. Those questions that show up on the exam are identified as "group questions," and if everyone in the group gets the question correct, they get a bonus point.
- Allow groups who are registered and meet regularly to take one of the quizzes as a group with everyone receiving the group grade.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; What Happens When Students Study Together? Faculty Focus; September 21, 2016 [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/happens-students-study-together/>] September 30, 2016.