Collaborative Assignments and Projects

What is collaborative learning?

Characteristics
Collaborative learning is based on the view that knowledge is a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on four principles:

- The learner or student is the primary focus of instruction.
- Interaction and "doing" are of primary importance.
- Working in groups is an important mode of learning.
- Structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning.

Best Practices
What are some general strategies to keep in mind when incorporating group work?

- Introduce group work early in the semester to set clear student expectations.
- Plan for each stage of group work.
- Carefully explain to your students how groups will operate and how students will be graded.
- Help students develop the skills they need to succeed in doing group activities, such as using team-building exercises or introducing self-reflection techniques.
- Establish ground rules for participation and contributions.
- Consider using written contracts.
- Incorporate self and peer assessments for group members to evaluate their own and others' contributions.

What is the impact of collaborative learning or group work?
Research shows that educational experiences that are active, social, contextual, engaging, and student-owned lead to deeper learning. The benefits of collaborative learning include:

- Development of higher-level thinking, oral communication, self-management, and leadership skills.
- Promotion of student-faculty interaction.
- Increase in student retention, self-esteem, and responsibility.
- Exposure to and an increase in understanding of diverse perspectives.
- Preparation for real life social and employment situations.

References