



### Group Projects: Start Your Project Off Right

People want different things out of group projects. Some want a good grade and will obsessively read the rubric. Others want to master the material and schedule multiple meetings with the professor. A third group simply wants to pass the class and get the work done. Students also have many different strategies on how they want to meet their goals.

Sometimes assuming you are all on the same page won't be a problem. Different preferences won't affect your group's processes and end product. But in others, operating on the assumption that you want the same things without clarifying can result in unnecessary conflict and time wasting. Unfortunately, there's no way to know at the beginning of the project which ones are likely to implode if you don't see eye-to-eye. So your best way of dealing is to:

#### Set expectations.

In your first meeting, set group expectations. Write on a white board, take notes – make sure you are tracking visually. Also it's important that everyone agrees. We want consensus not majority-rule. Here are some areas to consider:

- **Communication.** How will we communicate with one another? Text, email, in-person meetings? How quickly should we be expected to respond? Are weekends off-limits for work talk? Are there any considerations around *how* you talk to one another – like no interrupting, speaking with respect, etc?
- **Work quality.** What grade are you aiming for? How many times should a written piece be revised? Do you expect to get a draft to the professor before final submission? How will you divide up work?
- **Meetings.** How often should we meet? Who sets the agenda? Will we set end times? What happens if people show up late or need to leave early? What if one person can't make it?

#### They're not interested? Convince them.

It shouldn't take longer than an hour to get these sorted out, and the areas of expectations will be different depending on the size and scope of the project. Hopefully your team will be game to contribute. If for some reason people want to avoid this step and start tackling the actual assignment, don't be afraid to gently push back.

Say something like: "I know we're under a time crunch and it's important to get started. I've just had some bad experiences in the past where we are on different pages, and our team ended up taking extra time later to make up for the disconnect. Can we spend 20 minutes at the next meeting?"

Feel free to be creative. If they're really worried about time, maybe people can come up with answers to the questions on their own. Then at the next meeting everyone can compare notes and set group expectations.

**What to expect from SCRC.** We offer conflict coaching, which is a 1-on-1 training opportunity with one of our staff members. Book a consultation and we can strategize how to best tackle setting expectations with your particular group. Facilitation is another service we offer, where a staff member could meet with your group and help to start, continue or finish the conversation.