

Considerations for Student Group Activities and Assignments.

Students may groan at the prospect of working in groups, but research shows that the interactions prompted by group work are crucial for student learning and well-being. Having opportunities for interaction and engagement with their peers helps build a sense of community among the students of a course, and helps improve student persistence (Nilson & Goodson, *Online Teaching at Its Best*, 140). Student group activities and assignments are helpful pedagogical choices to facilitate course-long projects, to facilitate student-run study groups within courses, and to provide routine interaction, **whether in-person or online**, with their peers.

Students and Group Work.

Student groups impact learning in many ways:

- Group interaction and collaboration gives each group member a chance to discuss, clarify, and understand course content;
- Group work allows students to create shared materials for assignments, presentations, or study guides; and,
- Group work emphasizes practical skills such as time management, negotiation, teamwork, and accountability.

Considerations When Using Canvas to Create Student Groups.

Using Canvas to create Student Group Sets is a helpful way to organize groups and to have a centralized digital space within which to work, **regardless of whether the course format is in-person or distance**.

- Within the People Tool, there is a tab to create student “Group Sets” (as it is called in Canvas). Instructors can organize groups by limiting the number of groups or the maximum number of students per group. Additionally, instructors can let Canvas decide to randomly select students to groups, or to allow students to self-select which group they want to join.
- There is no limit to the number of student groups per course. For example, instructors might create a discussion group that randomly selects students, a study group in which students can self-select, and a research group for students to work on group projects.

For student group work, it is important to have clear, concise instructions to communicate the purpose, the particulars of how to do the activity or assignment, and the learning outcomes related to group activities or assignments. Particularly for large projects, it is also important to have student groups co-create their group guidelines or divvy up individual responsibilities, and to figure out how they are accountable to each other. Finally, giving the students opportunities

to reflect and self-evaluate the group (both their individual work and the group as a whole) during and after the group work adds another layer of learning and gives students an opportunity to express themselves.

Student Groups provide students with an opportunity to learn valuable skills, while also staying on task for larger assignments and creating strong student-student interactions.

Reinert Center Resources

Resource Guide: [Alternative Formats for Quality & Engaging Online Discussions](#).

Resource Guide: [Effective Group Work](#).

Canvas Community Resources

[Groups Overview \(Instructors\)](#)

[What are Groups?](#)

[How do I automatically create groups in a Group Set?](#)

[How do I manually create groups in a Group Set?](#)

Additional Resources

Nilson, Linda B. & Ludwika A. Goodson (2021). [Online Teaching at its Best: Merging Instructional Design with Teaching and Learning Research](#). 2nd edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2021.

Ojie-Ahamoijie, G. (2024). "[Using Collaborative Learning to Elevate Students' Educational Experiences](#)." *Faculty Focus*, 16 October 2024.

Orlando, J. (2017). "[Tips for Addressing Social Loafing in Group Projects](#)." *Faculty Focus*, 6 October 2017.

Wells, G. (2015). "[Five Steps to Improving Online Group Work Assignments](#)". *Faculty Focus*, 20 April 2015.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#) or submit a [consultation request form](#).