

GROUP COMPOSITION TO ELIMINATE FREE RIDERS

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ABSTRACT

Due to the nature of business, working in groups effectively is a skill Colleges of Business wish to develop in all business majors. Consequently, group assignments are required in many business courses. Typically, these group assignments carry a high percentage of a student's grade so that potentially a student can pass a class if the group has an excellent work product. Many professors do incorporate student/peer evaluation but these evaluations may or may not be effective in establishing a student's contribution to the work product.

Based upon peer evaluations of group members, it became obvious that students in the advanced business statistics class often had free riders in the groups assigned. The instructor decided to experiment with group composition to attempt to eliminate free riders. Five semesters ago, the instructor composed groups based on assignment grade. The instructor ordered all the students by assignment grade from highest to lowest. To ensure diversity, the instructor also examined gender and ethnicity but within the frame of similar assignment grade. However, the instructor did not refer to grades on exams even though that information was available at the time of group formation. For the group projects currently assigned, the most effective group size has been three students. On the day of group assignment, the basis of group assignment was explained to the class.

A curious effect occurred as a by-product of this manner of group composition. The groups who were on the lowest end of the spectrum suddenly started doing the required assignments with group members taking each other to task, in a friendly manner, if work was not completed and turned in. This occurred even though these assignments were not related to the group project directly. However, when asked, the students related that they knew they could not do well enough on the project to pass the class if they did not develop prerequisite skills and knowledge.

A second effect is that student projects overall have been better executed so have had higher overall grades, on average, when compared to previous semesters. A third effect has occurred in just a few semesters and that is that students who are in the lowest group decide that they cannot do the work and withdraw from the class.

Obviously, the purpose of the experiment was to eliminate free riders, which it has accomplished very well. The additional benefits from this manner of composing groups were unexpected but seem to have made the class more beneficial to the students. Next, this researcher plans to develop a survey instrument to administer to students who have been assigned groups in this manner to ascertain student attitudes toward group work. Future research would then make a comparison of student attitudes toward group work based upon how groups were formed.