

# ALP Guide to Collaborative Learning Teams:

Forming and maintaining healthy groups.



**Medaille College**

School of Adult and Graduate Education

Accelerated Learning Program





Independent thinking alone is not suited to interdependent reality. Independent people who do not have the maturity to think and act interdependently may be good individual producers, but they won't be good leaders or team players. They're not coming from the paradigm of interdependence necessary to succeed in marriage, family, or organization reality.

*Stephen R. Covey*  
*The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*

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# Why collaborative learning?

It's simple.

Today's businesses work in teams.

So do we.

Medaille College is committed to developing teamwork and interpersonal skills in our Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) and Medaille Online Experience (MOE) students. The type, scope, and methodology of your collaborative learning activities will vary from program to program. ALP evening students use formal study groups to reduce required in-class time; MOE students use collaboration to establish virtual networks and increase student engagement; Fast Forward students engage in collaborative activities that enhance learning and mirror workplace teams. Learning teams provide a support network, but they play other important roles as well: they optimize the learning process and develop communication skills that are highly desirable in today's marketplace.

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Labor, surveyed Fortune 500 firms to determine those skills that employers look for most often. The results:

1. Teamwork
2. Problem solving
3. Interpersonal skills
4. Oral communication
5. Listening
6. Creative thinking
7. Leadership
8. Writing
9. Computation
10. Reading

Collaborative learning develops proficiency at the first seven skills on this list. Teams must learn to listen to one another, solve problems, communicate clearly, develop creative solutions, and resolve conflicts. Becoming adept at these skills will provide benefits beyond the classroom; refining your group skills prepares you for today's business and leadership challenges.

## ALP/MOE learning teams:

Part of how you learn...

Part of what you learn.

Because workplace teams and groups are so important to employers today, learning to work in teams is part of your curriculum in all Accelerated Learning Program and Medaille Online Experience courses. Developing team skills is an educational goal in every one of your classes.

Yes, you will be learning math, writing, finance, or strategy. However, while you are studying statistics, you are also improving your knowledge of group problem solving, communication, and conflict resolution. The weekly challenges that your group faces and surmounts together are developing your interpersonal skills; by the end of the class, you have not only learned about regression and analysis, but also about reflective listening, non-aggressive communication, and celebrating successes.

Thus, learning to work in teams is both what you learn and how you learn. Teams and groups also function as a support and networking mechanism for students, enhancing the learning process through collaboration. And please don't get distracted by terminology; the Accelerated Learning Program uses both terms – learning team and study group – interchangeably.

# Collaborative learning

*If you really want to understand something, try teaching it to someone else.*

Most people know that collaborative learning is a **highly efficient** way to learn and that working in teams develops **interpersonal skills**. Some other interesting points about ALP/MOE collaborative learning teams:

- In ALP evening programs, half of your required learning time will occur in your team meetings.
- Using virtual teams is one of the best practices identified for high-quality online programs.
- Learning teams may meet face to face, online, or by conference call. MOE teams are generally asynchronous, but may wish to establish a regular chat time. Teams are welcome to experiment with new and exciting communication technologies. However, participation in all weekly sessions is **mandatory for all group members**.
- On-ground learning teams choose their own time, place, and method for meeting.
- Team activities will account for a significant portion of your grade.
- Learning teams for the ALP evening programs must be comprised of three to five members and must meet for four hours every week.
- ALP evening students generally create their own learning teams; MOE and Fast Forward teams will change from course to course and are established by the instructor.
- Teams are encouraged to re-form periodically. Learning teams in cohorted programs may stay together for the length of the program, but doing so is **NOT** required or recommended.
- Learning teams who need guidance may find it in Student Services.
- In ALP, there is no difference between a learning team or a study group. Both terms are used interchangeably.

# Learning team benefits:

Developing strong team skills can significantly benefit your educational process. Some of the benefits include:

- Understanding and appreciating the value of teamwork. Employers consistently list teamwork proficiency as one of the most desirable skills in an employee.
- Attaining a higher level of quality and performance in class. As two heads may be better than one, so a group of three or four can significantly impact your level of performance. By combining your knowledge and experience, your group will find class concepts easier to manage, course projects more enlightening, and high educational standards more achievable.
- Sharing the teaching and learning responsibilities. Not everyone will be adept in the same courses. In some courses you will teach your group members; in others they will teach you. Teaching others helps to clarify and deepen your own learning.
- Providing a support network. Whenever stress or weariness threatens, your team's support, encouragement, and humor can help bring the fun back to learning.
- Developing interpersonal skills. Working in a group will require you to hone your listening and communication skills, sorting out ineffective language and behavior while focusing on productive interpersonal behaviors.
- Learning to lead and learning to follow. Learning team activities will call on you to play a variety of roles. Less assertive students will occasionally need to lead, and more assured students will need to acknowledge the views and contributions of others.
- Building self-confidence. Groups help you to realize your own potential. They bolster your confidence, celebrate your successes, and support you through your disappointments. They encourage you; they root for you; they stimulate, support, and promote you.



# Cultivating Successes: *Team Formation*

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## Cultivating Successes

There is no such thing as the perfect learning team or study group – at least not on the first day. Teams and groups may work toward perfection, may even come close to perfection, may even develop into that most desirable goal – a high-performance team. However, that happens through commitment and hard work, through carefully tending the relationships that make the team work, and through staying focused on your goals.

Watching a learning team develop is like watching a tree pass from spring to summer, from fall into winter, and then emerge – stronger than ever – in a new spring. There are predictable stages – or seasons – for a long-term team, and this section of the *ALP Guide to Collaborative Learning Teams* was developed to help our students through the very difficult tasks of forming groups, developing your team constitution, recognizing the stages of team development, and establishing productive work habits.

Because formation processes for online and on-ground teams differ, this section includes separate discussions of the on-ground and online team formation processes. At the end, you will find some ideas that apply to both types of learning teams.

The fruits of your efforts should be a harvest of skills that will both support your academic achievement and increase your productivity at work. Becoming proficient at teamwork and interpersonal dynamics will reap benefits for years to come, season after season.



# 1. On-ground Learning Team Formation

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While online teams are established by the instructor during the first week, on-ground team formation often involves face-to-face interaction by potential group members.

*Group formation day can be tough for everybody. Everybody!* It can bring back images from junior high school gym class, the first day your class picked sides for volleyball, when you were the last one chosen. Here are a few hints that may make team formation less distressing:

1. No team selections are final. You are not married to your group. If this team doesn't work out, you can move into a new group for the next course.
2. There is no such thing as the perfect team – at least not on learning team formation day. You and your group members may become the perfect team, but that happens through commitment and hard work, not by choosing.
3. You don't have to limit yourself to the people that you sat with on the first night. You don't have to limit yourself to those people who live near you, who look like you, or who have a similar background. Make a real effort to get to know everyone – you may be surprised.
4. Give serious thought to your personal goals for the program. What grades will be acceptable to you? Are you willing to put in extra time to make your team more successful? Seek out other students with similar goals and ambitions.
5. Be outgoing! If you really want to work with a particular person or group of people, approach them openly. Don't wait for them to approach you.
6. Your self-esteem does not depend on being chosen first. Rather, your self-esteem will be tied more directly to being an asset to your group, a contributing member of a high-performing team.
7. Take advantage of the observations you make and the interactions you will have in the upcoming weeks. You should have the chance to meet and work with everyone. Use your critical analysis skills to identify the people with whom you will work the best and from whom you can learn the most.
8. It's not personal! Don't work with someone just because you don't want to hurt their feelings.

# Self-Reflection and Examination (Know Thyself)

Before the first night of class, answer the following questions truthfully...

1. What are your goals for this program?
2. What are your grade expectations?
3. What strengths will you bring to the cohort and your group?
4. How might your work experiences contribute to your cohort's discussions and learning?
5. What academic challenges do you see ahead for you?

Please complete this chart with the times that you cannot meet and indicate those meeting times you find most desirable (in order of preference):

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

What technological skills and equipment do you possess that could assist with distance group meetings?

List **two locations** where your group could meet. This would be a location available to you for weekly meetings. Private conference rooms, libraries, homes and public meeting rooms have all proven to be good locations.



# Temporary On-ground Learning Teams

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For the first three weeks of your first course, you will be assigned to a temporary learning team. Each class will include a time for your assigned, temporary group to meet briefly and choose a time and place for this week's meeting.

Your instructor will try to place you with as many different cohort members as possible. Wise students will take this opportunity to reflect on each of the temporary group experiences. What worked? What didn't work? What did you learn about yourself in group situations?

Week One Team Members

Phone

E-mail

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Week Two Team Members

Phone

E-mail

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Week Three Team Members

Phone

E-mail

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# Reflection and Evaluation

## WEEK ONE TEMPORARY LEARNING TEAM

**Evaluation:** Assess the successes, challenges, and weaknesses of your temporary team.

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**Analysis:** If this group were to remain together, what issues would need to be addressed?

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## WEEK TWO TEMPORARY LEARNING TEAM

**Evaluation:** Assess the successes, challenges, and weaknesses of your temporary team.

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**Analysis:** If this group were to remain together, what issues would need to be addressed?

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## WEEK THREE TEMPORARY LEARNING TEAM

**Evaluation:** Assess the successes, challenges, and weaknesses of your temporary team.

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**Analysis:** If this group were to remain together, what issues would need to be addressed?

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# Build a Healthy Cohort

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## **Plan for the success of the whole cohort.**

Just as each student is a member of a learning team, each group is a member of the cohort. Having one healthy team in the midst of a dysfunctional cohort does not promote educational success for anyone. Therefore, it is worthwhile to take a moment and plan your learning team formation. Try to discourage all the accountants from joining together. Encourage people of different ages, genders, races, and backgrounds to mix; try not to stick with what is safe and familiar. Form your groups for success: Does every team have someone who is comfortable presenting? Does each group have an expert in writing, math, and computers? Your learning experiences will be significantly improved when ALL the learning teams in your cohort are healthy, functioning learning teams.

## **Choose a Class Representative.**

Every cohort has a Class Rep who facilitates communication among the cohort, the instructor, the administration, and the College. He or she becomes the voice for your cohort, channeling requests and information back and forth among students, faculty, and administration. Your student handbook contains the following list of Class Rep responsibilities.

1. Serving as spokesperson for the group in order to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Medaille College Accelerated Learning Program.
2. Welcoming new students to the cohort (even if the student is enrolled for one course) and facilitating the student's entry into an available learning team.
3. Developing and coordinating the use of the telephone calling chain for informing students of important information.
4. Assisting the class in organizing social events, as appropriate.
5. Attending periodic meetings as scheduled.
6. Assisting in the distribution of program-related materials and correspondence. (Class reps should check the cohort mailbox each week prior to class and distribute mail to class members.)
7. Contacting and assisting faculty members as needed.
8. Notifying Academic Services if the class does not convene as scheduled for any reason, or if the meeting location changes.
9. Providing contact information to expedite communication with the cohort.

## **Establish the optimal number of learning teams for your cohort.**

Working from the number of students in your cohort, determine the ideal number of learning teams. Remember that a larger number of small groups (3-4 members) makes your cohort more flexible and more able to respond to the developing needs and requests of individuals.

Cohort Number \_\_\_\_\_

Class Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Optimal # of Teams \_\_\_\_\_

## **Sell yourself**

Many cohorts choose to start the team formation activities by allowing each student one last chance to speak to the group. Sum up your strengths, your learning and teamwork styles, and the areas in which you are especially interested in supplementing your own skills. Present yourself in a positive light, focusing on what you will add to your learning team.

## **Keep an open mind; take a chance.**

Remember that no decisions are irreversible; you are not entering into a binding contract with your team members. If you are uncertain about a classmate's skills or interaction style, keep in mind that your perceptions may be skewed by your own talents and experience.

It is sometimes difficult to recognize the value of different aptitudes and abilities, since we tend to regard our own most highly. However, just because you don't see the worth of a member's talents now, that does not mean that you won't appreciate them later. By the time you complete the rigorous course of study ahead of you, you will most likely have found a use for all the expertise, dexterity, flair, and discernment you can find. Don't be too hasty to decide there is no place in your group for someone of differing skills or understanding.

# Learning Team Member List

(3-5 members only)

COHORT # \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Meeting Day and Time \_\_\_\_\_

Team Meeting Location \_\_\_\_\_

# Cohort Phone Tree – Cohort \_\_\_\_\_

	Day phone	Cell phone
Class Representative		
Team One		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Team Two		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Team Three		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Team Four		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Team Five		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

# Cohort E-Mail Tree – Cohort \_\_\_\_\_

	E-mail address
Class Representative	
Team One	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Team Two	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Team Three	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Team Four	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Team Five	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	



## 2. Online Learning Team Formation

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Learning teams for the Medaille Online Experience and Take Five courses will be established by the instructor before Saturday of the first week. The instructor is responsible for assembling the actual team members, but the team itself is responsible for actively engaging in the group formation activities that will change a random selection of people into a team. Here are some hints to make your group experiences as productive and stress-free as possible:

- Respond quickly and fully to the first discussion question, which asks you to introduce yourself to your instructor and classmates. Be sure to include any relevant information, such as time zone, military deployment, or job demands, as well as information about your knowledge and experiences. This will provide some basic information to inform the instructor.
- Be discreet. Contact the instructor privately if you have concerns to share about past experiences or specific classmates.
- Make an effort to get to know your teammates. Share pictures or personal stories that will allow them to see you as a person rather than just a login name.
- Work on building trust. Remember that trust is a result of predictable behavior. If you are on time with all your posts and your assignments, your group will begin to trust that this behavior exemplifies how you work.
- Make sure your team develops some clearly articulated goals. These may be related to expected grades, or to operating procedures, or to quality of products. A common goal is necessary for becoming a team.
- Give serious thought to finding a time to meet synchronously, even if it is only for fifteen or twenty minutes a week. Research shows that even a short amount of time when the whole group is instant messaging can help reduce miscommunication.
- Take your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) seriously. In it, you will establish expected behavior, as well as the rules by which team members may be removed.



### 3. Stages of Team Development

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#### Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing

Groups tend to go through several predictable stages as they work toward efficiency and high performance. Look for the following stages in your team's development:

##### Forming:

Members get to know one another's personalities, learning styles, and work preferences. The group is still a conglomeration of individuals rather than a team. Members may be tentative and unsure; they are often excessively polite or cautious about expressing unpopular reactions. Optimism prevails, but progress toward the group goals may be slow.

*During this period, the group should create their group mission and operating principles.*

##### Storming:

As the honeymoon period wears off and group members feel more comfortable in their roles, team meetings may become stormier. Members with strong personalities will be working out relationships; shyer members will suddenly find their voices. Overall, you will be testing the strength of the group's commitment, and that is good.

*During this period, conflicts should be expressed and worked through. If you give up on the team now, it may never recover.*

##### Norming:

During this period, the team begins to function as a group. Team members become better acquainted and are more sensitive to one another's style and personality. Your understanding of the group process, the shared goals, and the required skills increases and you feel more confident of the team's ability to meet its objectives.

*During this period, you should review and revise your team mission and operating principles so that they reflect how you actually operate.*

##### Performing:

This stage is characterized by a smoothly functioning team. As problems arise, they are addressed and resolved smoothly. Group members understand and respect one another; the level of trust is high. The group has become cohesive and productive.

*No team will be able to sustain this stage continuously. You will probably slide back and forth between stages.*



## 4. Team Constitution or MOU

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In order to become a team, a group of people must share a common goal and establish the processes by which they will work. You and your team will be asked to create either a Team Constitution or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Team Constitution is required of all ALP evening program on-ground students. It is developed during the first course, submitted to your instructor, and reviewed as needed throughout the program. Because ALP learning teams tend to stay together for longer than one course, it is important to establish processes and relationships that will support the development of high-performance characteristics. A team constitution consists of three parts:

- Team mission and goals,
- Team member information, and
- Operating principles.

Memorandum of Understanding is a term borrowed from the field of project management that refers to an agreement established for the completion of a specific task or assignment. Because online teams may remain intact for only one course, the MOU is a more appropriate method for addressing all the important information needed to move forward. A template for the MOE MOU is included in this Guide and contains the following parts:

- Team Goals
- Problem Statement
- Communication Plan
- Rules for Quality Work
- Decisions and Conflicts
- Rules for Removal from the Team
- Team Members

The following pages will help you develop your goals and the rules by which your team will operate.

# Team Constitution

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## Mission and Goals

Only you and your team members will know what your team mission and goals may be. Interestingly, your mission as a team may change as you progress through the program. Many teams start out with goals such as, “Get all required work done within four hours,” and “Earn at least a B on all group work.” Yet, within four or five courses, the goal may be set for a higher grade, regardless of additional time demands. A mission may start out as “Get through the program as quickly as possible;” don’t be surprised if it becomes, “Support team members whenever they need it.”

Be sure to spend sufficient time talking about your team goals and incorporating them into a team mission. To be able to function as a team, you need to have a shared purpose; for the team to be truly successful, that purpose needs to incorporate input from all team members.

## Operating Principles

Your first meeting is very important, for your learning team must quickly make some decisions that will directly influence the likelihood of your being successful. You must answer two groups of questions, and although the team may alter its decisions at any time, these first discussions are an integral part of your team’s development. The first set of questions asks you to describe who you are and what you expect from the group. You need to decide and record:

1. What is the name of this team?
2. Who are the members of this team?
3. What are the team goals and mission?
4. When will this team meet?
5. Where will this team meet?
6. Who may be contacted in case of an emergency?

The second set of questions, although less philosophical, still requires thoughtful answers to insure a healthy, functioning learning team by determining how you expect your group to behave?

1. How will you inform team members if you are running late or need to miss a meeting?
2. What does “on time” mean?
3. How will you deal with lateness to meetings?
4. How will you deal with cell phones during meetings?
5. How will you use an agenda?
6. Who will create it?
7. How will you deal with members who are unprepared?
8. How will you insure that all members participate?
9. How will you deal with individuals who dominate or don’t participate?

10. How will you share information?
11. How will you make decisions?
12. How will you insure quality work?
13. What will you do if a team member's work is not up to standard?
14. What kinds of behavior are acceptable?
15. How will you approach conflict?

Once you have answered all these questions, combine your mission and goals, team information, and operating principles into one document. Make a copy for every member and one copy for ALP Student Services. (Give this copy to your current instructor and ask him/her to leave it for Student Services.)

### Review and Revision

Because ALP teams tend to remain intact for a longer period of time, it is important that you regularly review and revise your team constitution. ALP advises that you re-examine it in the following situations:

- Halfway through your program.
- Whenever the team members change. Adding a new person or losing a member will change the dynamic of your group.
- If the group is experiencing conflict. It is good to review how you planned to deal with issues; it helps to bring perspective.

# Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

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## Team Goals

Be sure that your first discussion includes a conversation about team goals. If half of your team wants to complete the course while investing the fewest number of hours possible, while the other half will only be satisfied with the very highest grade, your team will have some weighty problems to resolve. Time spent resolving them at the beginning of class will be worthwhile, allowing everyone to concentrate on solving the team problems during the rest of the course.

## Problem Statement

Each course includes a team problem that you will be asked to solve. The solution will be spread out over the first six weeks of the course – and in Week 1 you will always be asked to make a decision about that problem and articulate it into a clear problem statement. You may be asked to choose a topic or to describe the type of final project product or even to make a recommendation. Each course problem will be described on the course project sheet – and each MOU will require a clear definition of the problem that you will be attempting.

## Communication Plan

Because most communication between team members will occur online, it is worthwhile for your team to spend time establishing some expected virtual behaviors.

- Establish expected response time for all team communications. How often should you check the team discussion boards? How will you deal with team members who fail to contribute to the discussion?
- Establish team rules of etiquette. How will team members communicate politely and meaningfully?
- Try to establish a synchronous meeting for at least thirty minutes each week. (*This will not be possible for all teams, but is recommended if achievable.*) Use <http://doodle.com/> to coordinate schedules; Blackboard IM is an appropriate tool for your online meetings.
- Establish weekly roles and agendas; set due dates for all team member submissions.

## Rules for Quality of Work

Make sure that expectations are shared among all team members. Take enough time to establish your own standard of quality work. Below are two examples of team standards.

- Quality work will use college-level Standard English with no spelling or mechanical errors.
- Assignment quality will be evaluated and accepted by the team on a basis of majority rule.

## Decisions and Conflict

Making group decisions is hard enough when everyone is present face to face. In an asynchronous discussion, it can become very frustrating. If you pose a solution on Friday night and no one even looks at it until Sunday, how will you know to proceed? Decide how your group will deal with important decision points or internal conflict.

- Identify which decisions must have input from the whole group. Establish a schedule that will allow that.
- Decide how you will resolve an impasse. Will you take a simple vote or must the team come to consensus?
- Resolving conflicts accounts for one whole section of this Guide. Be sure to spend some time discussing the types of conflict that you expect and how you plan to use that conflict in a positive way.

## Rules for Removal from the Team

All MOE team members are expected to perform according to the team goals and quality standards as described in their MOU. Team members who consistently fail to perform may be asked to leave the team.

If a majority of the team agrees that a member is not performing at expected levels, he/she may be asked to leave the team. Before removing a member, however, the team must confront the non-performing member and permit a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate modified behavior. This demonstration should occur within one week. The instructor should be notified for record-keeping purposes only.

Any student who has been asked to leave a team will work directly with the instructor. The student will be responsible for completing all deliverables of the entire project alone. Undergraduate students cannot score higher than 76% on the team assignments if working without a team. Graduate students cannot score higher than 86%.

For what reasons would you want to remove a member from the team? Articulate these reasons clearly in your MOU.



## 5. Developing Successful Habits

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Recent studies on effective design or virtual teams highlighted certain traits that were found among all the most successful teams. Although not all of these may be appropriate for your learning team, it is worthwhile to examine those traits common to the most effective teams:

Successful on-ground teams:

- Maintain time frame.
- Serve refreshments.
- Prepare and follow an agenda.
- Include a trust-building activity at each meeting.
- Establish operating procedures.
- Have a recorder keep minutes and take notes.
- Have a process observer or facilitator.
- Plan their work.
- Know when to stop planning and implement.

Successful virtual teams:

- Work at building and supporting social relationships.
- Recognize the normal group development stages.
- Spend some time online synchronously.
- Conduct a virtual kickoff meeting.
- Establish communication guidelines.
- Acknowledge and respect cultural diversity.
- Create team agreements.
- Develop trust through reliable behavior.
- Establish and rotate team roles.

Were you surprised to find any of these behaviors on the list? If you do not recognize some of the terms or roles, the next section of this manual will provide more details.

## EXERCISE: A Dozen Traits of a Healthy Team

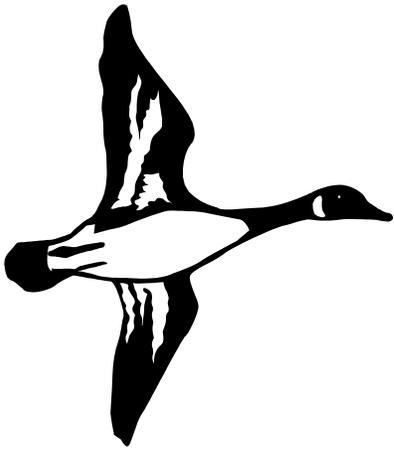
Recent research has shown that healthy teams demonstrate some traits in common. The top twelve are listed below.

Which traits do you think are most important? Take three minutes and rank them from most important (1) to least important (12).

Then, working together with your team, discuss your ranking. See if you can come to consensus on a group ranking that reflects your team's opinions and discussion.

Your rating	Healthy teams tend to:	Team rating
	a. Have established rules to which all members agree	
	b. Serve food	
	c. Use humor to maneuver through bumpy places	
	d. Start and end on time/ maintain strict online schedules	
	e. Establish an agenda and stick to it	
	f. Trust each other	
	g. Establish team roles to ensure efficiency	
	h. Have established a working definition of consensus	
	i. View conflict as necessary and productive	
	j. Celebrate when appropriate	
	k. Look for creative solutions to problems	
	l. Communicate well and constantly	

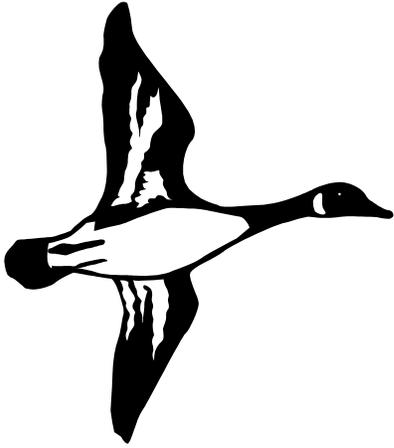




# Learning to Fly:

*Team Roles and Responsibilities*

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## Learning to Fly

This section includes information and exercises on group dynamics, a term used to refer to the ways in which teams operate. As you become proficient with the strategies and techniques covered here, you should find that your learning team becomes more effective, more productive, and more enjoyable.

A classic example of effective teamwork is found with Canada Geese, who have honed their teamwork skills over thousands of years. They start by effectively using physics, for as each goose flaps its wings, it produces an uplifting air current that helps the goose behind it. The V formation in which geese travel maximizes the updraft for each goose; by flying as a team, the flock can travel much farther than an individual could alone. Because the leader feels more drag and resistance, geese rotate in and out of the leadership position. The geese flying farther back in the V honk to encourage those in front of them. And when a goose cannot keep up, two other geese drop out of formation and follow it to ground, where they stay with it until it is able to fly again.

Your learning team must also learn to function cohesively, working together to lighten burdens, sharing leadership, and assisting those who might fall behind. To help you test your wings, this section provides an overview of team leadership, group roles, terms and concepts, brainstorming, maintaining group quality, positive group and individual behaviors, and a checklist to gauge your progress.



# 1. Leadership

In high-performing learning teams leadership is shared. Because this is such an important concept, let's look at one explanation of leadership:

As we use the term, *leadership* assumes each individual's ability, right, and responsibility to think and to make choices. In a team situation, mutual respect and influence among members transform individual responses into team choices and actions. Thus, every team member has the *responsibility* to share leadership, to affect the thinking of others, and to influence the team's processes and outcomes (Lumsden, 2000, p. 29).

All teams - on-ground and online - should make leadership a shared responsibility. Some teams keep leadership informal; some find the need to designate a more official role. However you structure your team, no leader should be permanent. If you find that your group functions better with a more formal leadership position, imitate the geese and rotate the job from week to week, or from course to course.

As a team leader, you should:

- Set the standards for interaction. Expect openness, cooperation, responsibility, and mutual concern. Openly state your expectations.
- Encourage involvement from every team member. Ask for input from those members who aren't volunteering it. Confirm the validity of other's statements through eye contact, agreement, open questions. Leaders of online or virtual teams should watch for members who drop out or stop participating; a personal email from you may be enough to re-energize them.
- Encourage trust and openness. As you reveal more about yourself, others will feel secure enough to do the same. Group members learn to trust each other as they come to know and understand each other.
- Help to manage conflicts. Remind the team that conflict is normal and positive. Use all your communication and negotiation skills to work toward compromise and consensus.
- Connect with the others in your group. Don't exclude members or form exclusive pairings. Be generous in expressing appreciation, admiration, and encouragement. Stay open-minded and interested in other points of view.
- Keep the team in mind. Learn to think as a group. Adopt a motto (United we stand; all for one and one for all, etc.) to remind you that you are not functioning solely as an individual here. Don't keep score of who wins the most conflicts.

- Recognize stress and deal with it. Your team is going to face some stressful times. Help to diagnose the causes and find ways to relieve it. Use humor, take a break, eat something – find a way to break down tension and work toward resolution (not escalation) of conflicts. (Lumsden, p. 34).
- Think Win-Win. If you haven't recently reviewed Habit 4 of Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, do so. Keep reminding your team members that that working collaboratively is not a competition. Everyone benefits from every success.

Take a moment and develop your own definition of leadership as it applies to your learning team. Include your ideas about a leader's responsibility to the team and how his/her opinions, preferences, abilities, and choices affect the rest of the group.

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Once your learning team is formed, decide how your group defines leadership and how you will share leadership within your team.

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## 2. Team Meeting Roles

To run effectively, team interactions need to be managed. To get the most out of your on-ground team meetings, we suggest three key roles should be assigned for each meeting. Your team may decide to assign other roles as well.

**Facilitator:** This person will direct the flow of the meeting, functioning as a leader when needed. Every member of your team should take a turn serving as facilitator. It is the facilitator's job to:

- Start the meeting on time
- Review the agenda with the group and get agreement on it.
- Summarize arguments, propositions, or conflicts.
- Confirm consensus on decisions and actions.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Remain neutral whenever possible.

**Time Keeper:** This person will hold the group to its schedule, keeping one eye on his/her watch and the other on the agenda. It is the timekeeper's job to:

- Inform the team when time for one project is nearly up.
- Listen for discussion drift and nudge the discussion back on track.
- Call for a decision point or resolution at the end of the allotted time.

**Recorder:** This person documents or records the ideas and activities of the team meeting. It is the recorder's job to:

- Take notes, when needed.
- Write lists on boards or easels.
- Maintain your team's records.
- Distribute notes from the meeting to the other team members.
- Keep track of Works in Progress

Your team may decide to assign other roles as well.

Online teams need to be managed as well. Although the online technology often gets most of the attention when discussing virtual teams, it is actually the nature of the team interaction – not the technology – that presents most challenges. In order to make your virtual teams as effective as possible, we recommend establishing the following roles:

- Team Chair: This person is responsible for monitoring the flow of your online interaction. It is the Team Chair's job to:
- Track timely contributions to the weekly discussions.
  - Monitor progress on the Work Breakdown Schedule.
  - Contact members who have not posted within a reasonable time period.
  - Summarize and articulate team decisions.
  - Keep everyone on schedule and aware of upcoming deliverables.
- Techie: This person focuses on required technology and software. He/she will be able to make recommendations on the media and form of your final group project. It is this person's job to:
- Assess and advise on the technical capabilities of the team.
  - Identify and suggest the best technology tool for each project task.
  - Research and locate support or assistance with unfamiliar communication modes.
  - Provide quality assurance for the final product.
- Archivist: This person maintains the group files – either in Blackboard or some other file-sharing site. It is this person's job to:
- Maintain document control and see that everyone works from the latest version of the project.
  - Summarize or synthesize multiple responses.
  - Compile individual contributions into one team document and submit it to the instructor on time.
  - Post drafts for review and revision.

Your team may decide to assign other roles as well. Rotate roles often; be sure that you do not take the same role week after week and course after course.



### 3. Teamwork Terms and Concepts

Agenda	<p>The agenda directs the learning team's activities by planning the most efficient use of time. To be effective the agenda must contain both of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A list of activities for the meeting</li><li>2. An allotted time for each activity</li></ol>
Brainstorming	<p>Brainstorming is a group technique for generating ideas that is especially useful in creative problem solving. Using four simple rules, a group generates as many potential solutions as possible.</p>
Consensus	<p>Consensus refers to a general agreement or accord reached by the group. Consensus does not mean unanimous approval or total agreement, but it does mean total acceptance. When a team comes to consensus, it means that they have developed a decision that everyone can support and to which everyone can commit. It may not be everyone's first choice; there may even be members who don't particularly like that solution. But everyone must feel comfortable enough to support, execute, and defend the decision. Once a group comes to consensus, the decision belongs to the group, not to the individual who first conceived it.</p>
Decision Point	<p>A Decision Point (or DP) comes when the entire group has decided on a specific course of action. DPs should be noted by the recorder or the archivist.</p>
MOU:	<p>A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a document that articulates the process agreed upon for the completion of a specific task or assignment. In MOE courses, the MOU includes the team goals, problem, communication guidelines, and operating principles.</p>
Mission	<p>Your team mission states the common goal for which all group members are striving. The mission statement is part of your team constitution.</p>

Operating Principles	Your operating principles are the rules by which your group operates. Although your group will develop a set of guidelines during your first class, operating principles should be regularly reviewed and modified. As membership, group dynamics, and meeting times or places change, your operating principles will need to evolve to accommodate new situations.
Team	A team is defined as <i>a group of people working collaboratively to reach a common goal</i> . Please notice the important parts of this definition: <u>Group</u> – means more than two. Formal learning teams in the ALP evening program must consist of at least three and not more than five members. Two does not constitute a group. <u>Working collaboratively</u> – means problems are solved by the interaction of group members. Dividing a problem up into pieces and working individually is not collaborative learning. <u>Common goal</u> – means a goal that has the support of all group members. Without the goal, you cannot be a team.
Team Constitution	Your team constitution refers to a package that includes your team mission, operating principles, and information on members, meeting times, and meeting place.
Virtual Team:	A virtual team is one in which members share a common purpose, but are separated by distance. In such a team, members are linked only by communication technologies.
Work in Progress	Any ongoing project is a work in progress or WIP. The recorder should keep a list of who is doing what for each WIP. Any issue on which the group has not yet reached consensus can also be considered a WIP.



## 4. Brainstorming Rules

Effective brainstorming is one of the most useful skills that your team can develop. Truly creative solutions are not usually the first ideas that come to light. To get the best solution, a team needs to generate many possible answers.

If you do some quick research, you will find many tips and techniques to hone your brainstorming skills. Even the simplest brainstorming sessions, however, need to follow four basic rules:

- Rule #1      **Withhold criticism.** Don't evaluate any of the solutions as they are being generated. It is best not to comment at all – either positively or negatively. Save that for later.
  
- Rule #2      **Go for quantity.** Don't worry about quality yet. The more answers or solutions that you generate, the more likely you are to generate truly creative ones.
  
- Rule #3      **Piggy-back or hitchhike.** Use your teammate's contributions to suggest even more possibilities. Listen – then think! Take an idea and modify or add to it.
  
- Rule #4      **Contribute all ideas – even the wild and zany ones.** A crazy, impractical idea is very likely to suggest a more realistic, yet highly creative answer when the brainstorming process is over and the evaluation begins.

Some additional tips for effective brainstorming include:

- ✓ Be sure you clearly define the problem that you are attacking.
- ✓ Don't interrupt the thought process. Turn off phones and eliminate distractions.
- ✓ Virtual teams may find brainstorming easier if it can be accomplished in a synchronous discussion.
- ✓ Be sure you have a way of capturing all the ideas. Designate someone to write everything down or tape-record the session.
- ✓ Set a time limit.
- ✓ Think of the brainstorming session as a “mind-dump.” The goal is to accumulate as large a “pile” of ideas as you possibly can.

- ✓ Push yourself to generate more ideas. Say, “We have come up with 34 ideas. Can we get it to 40?”
- ✓ Don’t squelch ideas! Don’t allow criticism – or even comment – on any of the ideas.
- ✓ Virtual teams who must function in an asynchronous environment must be sure to diligently check posts and respond promptly, or the brainstorming may lose momentum.
- ✓ Mind mapping and brainstorming apps which create diagrams of relationships between concepts, ideas or other pieces of information can support online brainstorming.

When you are done, and have accumulated as many ideas as possible, you will need to categorize, analyze, and evaluate them all. However, be sure that is a separate activity.



## 5. Maintaining Standards: Learning Teams and Academic Quality

In most cases, you will find that working in a learning team improves the quality of your academic work. If you believe the old adage that “None of us is as smart as all of us,” it makes sense to expect that your understanding, your output, and your commitment will increase as a result of working in teams (Housel, 2002, p. 2).

However, collaborative learning brings with it new challenges and concerns. Please take note of the following:

- You are NOT expected to carry non-performers in your team. Every group member must participate and must contribute. Every member’s contribution will be different, since we all bring different strengths and experiences. However, every member must be a contributing member.
- The entire team is responsible for group work. If one member’s section is particularly weak, the entire team’s grade will be affected. Thus the group is forced to describe and control the level of quality expected, and to put into place those mechanisms needed to ensure excellence. You may need to designate one group member as editor. You may need to work ahead to allow sufficient time for revisions or to provide more specific instructions to group members. In any case, remember that team projects receive one grade which is given to every member of the group.
- Like individual grades, team grades are assessed based on the performance of the team, not on effort or improvement. To help you judge the level of academic rigor associated with team grades, please review the following descriptions:
  - A = The group’s performance is excellent. Written and oral group work shows sharp insight into course concepts, in-depth research, and exceptional analysis. The group functions smoothly as a team, maintains excellent communication among members, and integrates ideas and experiences from all team members. All written material from the team demonstrates an impeccable command of the conventions of written English as well as a logical, original, and clearly articulated progression of ideas.

- B = The team's performance is good to very good. Written and oral group work shows a firm command of course concepts, quality research, and thoughtful analysis. The group functions well as a team; group work shows evidence of proficient communication and reasonably balanced participation by all group members. Written material demonstrates a command of college-level English and a solid, capable progression of ideas. This team consistently accomplishes more than the minimum requirements.
- C = The team's performance is satisfactory. Written and oral group work accomplishes the minimum requirements, but displays little or no initiative or original thought. The group functions adequately as a team; group communication and participation may reflect the efforts of individuals rather than the group. Written material demonstrates writing at an acceptable level for college material and a generally acceptable understanding of course concepts. This team has met the requirements, including deadlines, of the course.
- D = The team's performance is below average and barely acceptable. Group work demonstrates minimal effort; participation by all group members is questionable. Written material demonstrates only the lowest acceptable level of language skills. This team is passing by a slim margin only.
- F = The team's performance is unacceptable. Both the quality and the quantity of this group's work do not meet the minimum requirements of the course.



## 6. Positive Group Behaviors

There are some specific behaviors that will help to insure the success of your learning team. These include:

- Stay relaxed, cheerful, and supportive.
- Encourage originality and unusual ideas.
- Place a positive value on dissent. Don't be afraid to rock the boat or to look at the other side of issues. Try on a controversial idea every now and then.
- Encourage clear communication among all group members.
- Learn to be supportive listeners. Don't allow interruptions or domination.
- Always work toward consensus.
- Encourage creative problem solving by becoming proficient at brainstorming.
- Take actions to get everyone involved; ask for opinions from those who have remained quiet.
- Celebrate your successes.
- Spend some time each course evaluating your group processes and examining the lessons learned from the group experience.
- Ask for clarification. In Covey's words, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Listen when others are talking.
- Ask open-ended questions. It is easier to develop a dialog when the questions cannot be answered with "yes" or "no."
- Summarize. Use phrases such as, "If I understand correctly, what you are saying is..."
- Test for consensus. Summarize what you feel to be the group's decision, state it, and check to see if the group agrees.
- Practice giving constructive feedback.

## 7. Positive Individual Behaviors



There are some things that you can do as an individual that will help to insure the success of your learning team. These include:

- Commit to becoming an active member of your group.
- Work for a productive group through positive team behaviors.
- Resist keeping score of who wins the most arguments.
- Address interpersonal issues while they are still small. Don't let small irritations escalate into conflicts.
- Remember all the manners that your parents taught you. Be polite.
- In on-ground teams, show up for all meetings on time and prepared. In online teams participate promptly and meaningfully.
- Don't interrupt. Allow teammates to finish speaking before jumping in.
- Stay flexible and willing to compromise.
- Consult Student Services for advice when needed.
- Maintain ongoing communication with all your group members.
- Set aside personal agendas in favor of achieving group goals.
- Remain on-task during learning team meetings.
- Learn to listen. Try to listen more than you talk.
- Conduct yourself in an academic and professional manner during learning team meetings.

# Progress Check: A Checklist for Group Success

Score yourself at the end of your second course. Be sure to discuss your evaluation during a group meeting.

- \_\_\_ **Clear goals:** Do your goals allow the team to progress steadily toward completion?
  - \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ **Clear roles:** Does your team always know who is doing what?
- \_\_\_ **Clear communication:** Do your members
  - \_\_\_ speak their mind?
  - \_\_\_ speak succinctly, avoiding long anecdotes and examples?
  - \_\_\_ share information on many levels, including what they think, feel, and observe?
- \_\_\_ **Beneficial group behaviors:** Do your members
  - \_\_\_ initiate discussions and seek information and opinions?
  - \_\_\_ suggest procedures for solving problems?
  - \_\_\_ summarize the ideas presented by others?
  - \_\_\_ keep the discussion from digressing?
  - \_\_\_ work to the standards of the group?
  - \_\_\_ refer frequently to documentation and data?
  - \_\_\_ praise and correct others with equal fairness?
- \_\_\_ **Well-defined decision procedures:** Do your members
  - \_\_\_ explore important issues by polling?
  - \_\_\_ decide important issues by consensus?
  - \_\_\_ use data as the basis for decisions?
- \_\_\_ **Balanced participation:** Does your group
  - \_\_\_ have contributions from all members to most discussions?
  - \_\_\_ use each member's talents and experiences effectively?
- \_\_\_ **Established ground rules:** Do you refer to your operating principles when issues and conflicts arise?
- \_\_\_ **Awareness of the group process:** Do your members
  - \_\_\_ stay sensitive to non-verbal communication?
  - \_\_\_ notice and comment on group process problems?
- \_\_\_ **Logical, scientific approach:** Do your members
  - \_\_\_ avoid acting on hunches?
  - \_\_\_ ask for data before making decisions?
  - \_\_\_ use statistical tools to investigate problems?

(Adapted from *Study Groups: An Educational Technique that Works*, IPD, 2003.)

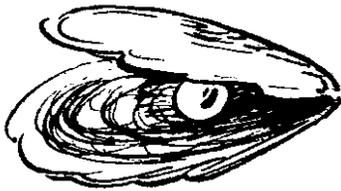




# Making Pearls:

*Managing conflict and change*

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## Making Pearls

Too often we look at conflict as failure: “We just cannot seem to agree on anything.” “Everything has to be a battle with him.” “Why can’t she just do what I want for a change?” Conflicts mean discord, arguments, tension, and sometimes quarreling. And yet, without conflict, your learning team cannot be great. It is just that simple.

It is too easy for a group to follow the path of least resistance, to settle for a good answer when a great one is needed. Conflict is what makes us see another point of view, dig deeper into the research, debate continuously until every side of the issue is examined and analyzed. Conflict is the sand in the oyster of group dynamics; without it there are no pearls.

Change is almost as difficult as conflict. Just when everything is settled, everyone is performing, and the team is operating smoothly, something transforms our comfortable environment and upsets all our careful plans. Yet change is as inevitable as conflict, and a wise learning team will plan for both.

To help learning teams manage conflict, deal with problems and make smooth transitions, this section includes conflict management strategies, non-threatening discussion techniques, predictable problems, worst practices, and procedures for changing team members. Dealing with these challenges wisely is the mark of a mature, highly-functional, effective learning team.



# 1. Conflict Management Techniques

*The only factor over which you have complete control is your own behavior.*

Our ALP/MOE students have usually had considerable experience with conflict. Situations at work, arguments with your teenagers, disagreements with a spouse all set up uncomfortable, emotion-fraught confrontations. Too often, this is the picture that comes to mind: raised voices, pounding hearts, sweaty palms, dashed hopes, tears, and tension headaches.

If your learning team conflicts look like that, you need to get them under control.

Most learning teams graduate without ever experiencing that kind of confrontation and emotional scene. However, that does not mean their lives are conflict-free. Imagine a different picture: four adults seated at a table, listening to one another. Their faces are intent. Their focus is concentrated on the speaker, who is leaning forward, her hands punctuating her dialogue, her tone impassioned. They are trying to resolve a conflict.

The following suggestions delineate five strategies to help learning teams deal with most of the issues that arise during their time with ALP. These suggestions work equally well for online or on-ground teams, since the group dynamics are similar in both.

1. Deal with issues while they are still small.
2. Maintain a collaborative mindset.
3. Establish a procedure and follow it.
4. Practice active listening and feedback techniques
5. Become proficient at using positive language.

By becoming adept at these five strategies, learning teams can improve their productivity because many of the issues that cause conflict will be dealt with smoothly, maturely, and effectively. Your team should feel like a haven, a support network – not a battlefield.

Please note, however: if your team is crippled by conflict, you need help. There are resources available to you; contact Student Services.

### 1. Deal with issues while they are still small.

Interpersonal irritants seem to have a cumulative effect; what starts as a small matter the first time it happens becomes more problematic by the fifth. By the fourteenth time, your nerves are on edge and your temper ready to explode. The first strategy is to deal with those aggravations while they are still small and manageable.

Raise issues that you fear might become bigger; identify sloppy processes or bad habits before they become part of your group culture. Deal with questions and concerns before they become a problem.

### 2. Maintain a collaborative mindset.

Most of the time, regardless of how intense the conflict, we are motivated to maintain our relationship with the other party or parties in the conflict. Remember this. You really don't want to leave the group, and you really don't want anyone else to walk either. Therefore, protect the relationships that you have already developed. The best ways to do this include:

- Remember Covey's first Habit: Seek first to understand, and then to be understood. Activate your curiosity. Really make an effort to comprehend the opposing point of view.
- Argue issues, not personalities. Separate a team member's position from his character.
- Think of your conflict as a problem that the whole group needs to solve together, rather than a one-on-one contest with a winner and a loser.

### 3. Establish a procedure and follow it.

Be prepared. While heads are cool and tempers well in check, decide how and when group members should introduce issues of potential controversy. Some of your conflicts will deal with academic issues – how to solve an accounting problem or which topic to choose for a group project – and these must be dealt with as part of your weekly group activities. However those matters that are concerned with process or behavior could be introduced at the beginning of a meeting or the end.

Review the literature on conflict resolution techniques and decide which your group will adopt. Will you require consensus or allow a simple vote? What issues are appropriate for the group to discuss and which are best debated between the concerned individuals? Incorporate a conflict resolution procedure into your group constitution. Then stick to it.

#### 4. Practice active listening and feedback techniques.

Many of us are not very good listeners. Instead we are processing in our heads, preparing our next statement, and enumerating our next points. However without listening, real communication is impossible. Good conflict resolution requires listening of the most careful and empathetic kind.

Good listening during conflict requires special effort, since we are often emotionally engaged and must struggle not to be distracted. Try the following to improve your listening skills:

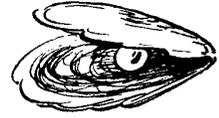
- Work at it: remove distractions, pay attention, maintain eye contact, and don't interrupt. Convince the speaker that he/she has your attention.
- Ask questions. Encourage the flow of information by posing open-ended, probing questions such as "Can you tell me more about that?" "Can you give me an example of what you mean by that?" "Do you mean..."
- Provide feedback to allow the speaker to gauge how well you understand his/her point. Repeat what you heard by saying, "Now, if I understand you correctly, what you are saying is...."
- Control your emotions. This is very difficult at times. Prepare for the emotions you and others may experience before you raise an issue. Stay as detached as possible. Take a time out if you feel yourself losing control. Ask a third party to help if appropriate.

#### 5. Become proficient at using positive language.

All language carries with it an emotional component. The connotation of words, the inflections you impose upon them, and the tone of your voice add yet another layer of meaning. It is very important to remember – as you choose your words – to use positive or neutral terms.

- Reword personal attacks. Rather than saying "This section is complete rubbish," you could say, "This section needs more work."
- Talk about behavior, not values. Rather than calling a teammate rude and stupid, explain that you would really appreciate knowing in advance when the group time has been changed.
- Move out of the past and into the future. Rather than "You have been late with your last three assignments" try "Please be sure next week's work is on time."
- Use words and phrases that refer to relationships. Repeat "I am sure we can work this out" as often as you can. Use plural pronouns whenever possible. "We are just going to have to get used to it" sounds much more inclusive than "You are just going to have to get used to it."

(Some strategies adapted from Collins, *Managing Conflict and Workplace Relationships*.)



## 2. Non-threatening Discussion Techniques

One of the most valuable team skills that you can develop is the ability to discuss sensitive issues without offending the other person. These non-confrontational verbal cues may help.

### When you..., I feel...

*Example: When you come to team meetings unprepared, I feel that you don't take it as seriously as the rest of us do.*

Start with “When you...” and state the behavior without exaggeration or judgment. Then describe how the behavior affects you. Don't speak for the whole group, since this could engender an “us against you” mentality.

### How might we...

*Example: How might we insure that everyone's opinion gets a chance to be heard rather than just hearing from a few people?*

Be careful to ask your questions without casting aspersions on any one individual. By involving the culprit in the solution, you allow him/her to recognize and change unwanted behavior.

### “I” statements

By starting a statement with ‘I’ the speaker takes ownership of the feelings and perceptions; he/she thereby avoids putting the other person on the defensive. Other ‘I’ statements include:

- I get anxious when you...
- I wonder if you are as committed to...when you...
- I feel defensive when you...



### 3. Predictable Teamwork Problems

See if you can figure out how to head off these problems before they begin:

- **Problem: Not Including Everyone.** Sometimes the people who should be involved with decisions aren't. This can lead to problems in implementing the team's decisions, as well as hurt feelings, resentment, and anger. The group may not discover this omission until important decisions requiring the buy-in of other people have already been made. What rules can be established to make sure that the right people are involved?
- **Problem: Undisciplined Behavior at Team Meetings.** Without careful management, team behavior can get out of control. Members arrive late or not at all. People come unprepared; some leave early, some get up to make phone calls. Noisy private conversations interrupt discussion. In the end, deadlines and commitments are not met. What rules can be established to insure that the meetings are disciplined and that members take the work of the team seriously?
- **Problem: Long, Drawn-out Discussions.** Although discussion is the key to making your group work, sometimes debate can get out of hand. Lengthy discussion may be necessary for making a complicated decision or it may become so rambling and unproductive that people become disinterested, willing to agree to anything just to get out of the meeting. How will you tell the difference, and what rules can help keep discussion productive and to the point?
- **Problem: Complaining.** Once group members get to know one another well, weekly meetings may become an outlet for personal problems. What rules can be established to discourage members from using the meeting as their outlet to complain about work or family?
- **Problem: The Dominating Team Member.** Every group has one or two members who talk the most or the loudest. While these members often have good ideas, they may overwhelm the ideas and opinions of other members. What can your group do to control those who tend to dominate discussions while still making them feel a valued part of the team?

(Adapted from *Effective Teamwork* by Michael Maginn)



## 4. Worst Practices

### A list of situations to avoid

- Splintering** “Splintering” refers to a group that is functioning as individuals or subgroups rather than a team. Projects are divided up and completed independently. There is no interaction of ideas, no stimulating discussions to generate insightful and original solutions. This usually results in a project that lacks unity and coherence. Demand that group work be done as a group.
- Floundering** This usually occurs at the beginning of a project, when a team has a hard time getting started. It is easier to handle here than at the end, when the team realizes that their efforts have been off-track or inconclusive. Look at the leadership and organization of your group; examine the decision-making techniques that you listed in your operating principles.
- Domination** Some group members can be very assertive, overbearing, or aggressive. They may tend to dominate the discussions or the decisions. Deal with this as soon as you notice it; the longer it continues, the harder it will be to correct the behavior. Talk to the individual. Remind him/her of your operating principles, of the need to maintain a balance of all participants. If the situation continues, contact Student Services for help, but be sure that you have tried to address the problem first.
- Reluctance** Some group members may seem reluctant participants in group discussions or decisions. Do not assume that you know the reason, for it could be caused by many things – shyness, fatigue, illness, lack of understanding, etc. Begin by asking open-ended questions and by directly requesting a response. If the problem becomes persistent, ask one person to inquire into the behavior, or contact Student Services for some help.
- Non-contribution** Some group members fail to accept their share of the workload. Some never manage to complete the work on time. Neither is acceptable and your group should take steps quickly before the

behavior becomes a habit. Do not allow this conduct. Address the issue with the non-contributing member. (Use the non-threatening discussion techniques discussed earlier.) Refer to your team constitution **or** MOU; how did you plan to deal with this? If the behavior continues, please contact Student Services.

Discernment	Too often, groups find themselves accepting one member's opinions as facts. This happens most often when the team finds itself pushed for time, impatient, or unwilling to work through the necessary logical approach to problems. The hardest part of this solution is recognizing the problem. Once one member does, he/she needs to bring it to the attention of the group.
Wanderlust	When group members lose track of the week's purpose or just want to avoid a difficult or sensitive issue, the discussion can wander along unproductive (though often interesting) routes. Stick to the agenda to solve this problem and get your time keeper a buzzer to push every time you wander off topic. Online teams should rely on the Team Chair to keep discussion on track.
Feuds	When group members are not getting along, it can cause anguish and distress for the entire group. Often, the cause of the feud has nothing to do with the learning team; it may even predate the group's formation. Ask the members to agree to leave their conflicts outside the group meeting. This situation may need intervention from Student Services. In extreme cases, it may require a re-formation of the learning team.
Discounting	Often the result of a feud, you may find a group member who habitually discounts, ridicules, or ignores the contribution of another member. Once again, this behavior needs to be addressed by the group before it becomes habitual. Support the ignored member without taking sides and talk privately to the offending individual.



## 5. Managing Team Changes

A small percentage of ALP learning teams make it from their first course to graduation with no change at all in their membership. Historically, it rarely happens. Most groups experience at least one change over the course of their program.

Learning team changes take a variety of forms:

- Your cohort may lose a member. As working adults, ALP evening students are vulnerable to the needs and requirements of their work environment. Some are transferred; some are asked to work nights. Family and social demands may also inhibit student persistence. Sometimes a different night and a different cohort suit a schedule better.
- You may decide to reform. Some groups find that they are rejuvenated by a regular dose of new ideas and personalities. Another student from your cohort may wish to leave his/her group. You may find that your work and learning styles best suit a different learning team and wish to change. In some cohorts, teams shift and re-form frequently.
- Your cohort may be asked to add a member. Occasionally students from other cohorts need to join yours – sometimes for a course or two, sometimes for the rest of the program sequence. Your learning team will be asked to accept these temporary or permanent members.
- You may wish to ask a member to leave. No team is asked to support non-performing group members indefinitely. Please note the procedure that must be followed before you may ask a group member to leave. The goal is always to modify behavior such that each team member becomes a participating contributor to the group. However, group members who fail to perform may be asked to leave.

The procedures for changing the make-up of your learning team are delineated here. The required forms are included in the last section of this manual.

# Changing the make-up of your learning team

If you approach learning teams with the understanding that their make-up will most likely change, you will be better prepared to deal with it. The rearrangement of group members can be distressing, challenging, rewarding - or all three at once. Learning teams from the ALP evening program tend to remain the most stable; thus, this discussion will be most relevant for those students.

ALL CHANGES MUST BE MADE BETWEEN COURSES. Groups must remain intact throughout a course.

## 1. To voluntarily leave a learning team:

- Provide adequate notice to your group. If you are in a three-person group, remember that they will need time to replace you.
- Keep your Class Representative informed, since that individual is instrumental in the shuffling and re-forming of learning teams.
- Notify Student Services of the new team composition.

## 2. To accept a temporary or permanent member into your group:

- Receive the group member's name and e-mail address from your Class Representative. Contact the new member in a timely fashion and inform him/her of your meeting time and place.
- Be welcoming, regardless of the circumstances around the new member's addition.
- Take some time to learn your new member's strengths and experiences. You may wish to open your team meeting with some ice-breaker or trust-building activities.
- Determine whether the new member is a permanent addition, or just joining the group for one or two courses.

## 3. To remove a non-performing team member:

*You must document the steps in this procedure using the forms provided in the back of this manual.*

- Document unacceptable behavior. Be sure that behavior is reflected on the Learning Team Evaluation Forms. Keep specific notes of negative or disruptive behavior, missed meetings, uncompleted assignments, and all efforts made to resolve the problem. A quick confidential e-mail to Student Services is a good way to document the issues with which your group is dealing.

- Review the unacceptable behavior formally. The group should meet to confer with the group member; try to set up a time outside the regular group meeting to do so. This meeting should be documented on the form, *Learning Team Intervention Record*. The form should be signed by all members of the group and a copy should be sent to Student Services.

At this meeting, identify – as specifically as possible – the student behavior at issue. The entire group should brainstorm potential solutions and develop a list of action items that could rectify the problem. The student must be given an adequate opportunity to modify his/her behavior.

Set a date to re-evaluate the issues discussed. Sign the Intervention Record and forward to Student Services.

- On the re-evaluation date, meet again to assess behavior. If the student has improved, and the group feels the improvement sufficient and continuing, the issue may be resolved.
- If student behavior has not improved, the group must meet with an administrator. This meeting must be documented on the form *Administration Intervention Form* found in the last section of this manual. The intervention process will be reviewed and a plan for moving forward will be established.
- The student may then be asked to leave the group; he/she must be given three weeks notice to make arrangements. Please note: ALL ALP LEARNING TEAM CHANGES MUST BE MADE BETWEEN COURSES. IN NO INSTANCES WILL GROUPS CHANGE MID-COURSE.

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# Learning Team Forms

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**Medaille College/ School of Adult and Graduate Education**  
**LEARNING TEAM RECORD**

**Cohort Number** \_\_\_\_\_ **/Course Number** \_\_\_\_\_

Learning Team Name	Location of Meeting*	Date	Scheduled Time

\* Locations may include online or on-ground meeting sites.

Record group behaviors here:	Describe tasks accomplished here:	List required resources:

**STUDENTS' VERIFICATION:** By signing this log, each student verifies the following: that the information contained in this log is complete and accurate; that he or she participated on the days and at the times noted; that the issues and behaviors described above were addressed by the entire learning team.

Name (Please print)

Signature

Hours attended (*if less than required hours*)

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\_\_\_\_\_  
 Faculty/Administration (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date



# Medaille College

School of Adult and Graduate Education  
Accelerated Learning Program

## Learning Team Evaluation Form

*Note: This form is to be completed by each group member in confidence. The instructor should also maintain confidentiality.*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Cohort Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Course: \_\_\_\_\_

## Attendance Record and Rating

*Please use the chart below to record attendance and to rate your team members' performance.  
0 = Lowest Evaluation 5 = Highest Evaluation*

Team Members	Weekly Meetings							Came to meetings prepared	Volunteered and cooperated	Made a significant contribution
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										
5.										

## Meeting Modality

*Please estimate the percentage of time group time spent in each of the team meeting modalities.*

Face to Face	Online	Teleconferencing	Other (explain)

## Team Skill Development

*Rate your team on the following team skills: 0 = Lowest Evaluation 5 = Highest Evaluation*

Communication	
Problem Solving	
Conflict Resolution	
Coming to consensus	
Sharing leadership	

→ What was your biggest challenge this class?

→ What was your biggest success?



# Medaille College

School of Adult and Graduate Education  
Accelerated Learning Program

## Learning Team Intervention Record

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Intervention Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Provide a brief description of the problem:

Summarize the discussions that occurred during the intervention.

What specific actions were identified to resolve the problem?

Date for re-evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please submit a copy of this form to the Student Services at your campus.*



# Medaille College

School of Adult and Graduate Education  
Accelerated Learning Program

## Administrator Intervention Record

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Intervention Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator/Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of team re-evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly review learning team actions and efforts.

Action Plan:

Signatures:

Team Members \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Administrator \_\_\_\_\_



# Medaille College

School of Adult and Graduate Education  
Accelerated Learning Program

## New Team Member Checklist and Review

Cohort: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Services Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

New Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Checklist:

Team name: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. New student has been informed about team meeting times and places.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The new student knows how to contact both the members of his/her learning team and the class representative.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. New student has been given a copy of the team constitution and the team has reviewed it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The learning team has identified any potential obstacles and developed a plan to address them.

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### Review:

At the end of the first course, please evaluate the success of this team change in a brief e-mail to your Student Services representative.