CCSSE

HIGHLIGHTS

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MAKING GROUP WORK *WORK*: Highlights from the 2006 *CCSSE* Workshop

More than 100 representatives from 50 colleges across 20 states attended the 2006 *CCSSE* Workshop in Austin (TX) on May 29, 2006. The workshop began with introductory and advanced break-out sessions highlighting strategies for examining and working with *CCSSE* results and concluded with Dr. Elizabeth Barkley's plenary session on *Making Group Work Work*. *CCSSE* workshops promise to engage teams of colleges in ways that help them foster student engagement and make effective use of their *CCSSE* results – all for the purpose of supporting student success, learning, and retention.

What participants report they enjoyed most about the 2006 *CCSSE* Workshop:

- The detailed review of the survey results.
- The opportunity to ask questions (data) of *CCSSE* staff.
- The tips *CCSSE* staff gave me on how to use data.
- Elizabeth Barkley's presentation was terrific! The use of strategies imbedded in the workshop surely demonstrates the power of these [collaborative learning] techniques.
- Networking with individuals from other institutions.
- Different ideas and suggestions from other participants.
- Meeting with others and sharing interesting info on colleges.

Dr. Barkley's session, *Making Group Work Work*, began by focusing on collaborative learning techniques and included discussions about ways to support collaboration through social interaction, classroom policies and procedures, and course content. Workshop attendees collaborated and proposed ideas for collaborative work in each of the following categories:

Social interaction:

- Scavenger hunt for personal information (about one another).
- Students respond to personality test and then find other classmates "like me."
- Interview and introduce each other.
- True/False: share something true and something false about yourself and ask others to guess which is which.
- Shoe example: Instructor to bring 7 different shoes (flip-flops, stilettos, work boots). Ask students which shoe represents their academic attitude. Which expresses their personality? Why?
- Students to collect e-mail addresses from five other students.

Class policies and procedures:

- Ask students to identify the policies on plagiarism and academic honesty.
- Give a quiz on the syllabus (and extra credit for that quiz).
- Ask students to list the unique qualities of a syllabus and identify what makes this syllabus different from those they may be accustomed to.
- Define expectations for work in a group.
- Debate class policies (e.g. cell phones).
- Students help shape the syllabus.
- Students help define class rules.

Course content:

- Campus tour.
- Peer editing – students set and achieve goals together.
- Case studies.
- Student presentations.
- Students interview one another about expectations.
- Cooperative reading and collaborative examples.
- Online chat groups.

Dr. Barkley also facilitated a discussion on how to "make group work work" during challenging situations. Topics of resistance, off-task behavior, differing ability levels, and inability of students to get along were addressed during small and large group discussions. Some of attendees' comments are shared below:

Resistance: How do I deal with students who resist group work?

- Identify roles within groups and allow students to choose their roles.
- Implement peer grading system whereby peers grade all members on participation.
- Provide a more difficult, non-group project as the alternative.
- Pair group work with readings (use textbook as authority but require interaction).
- Change roles and ask students why they don't want to be involved.
- Start with non-threatening activities.
- Make the resistance specific – identify the underlying problem/issue.
- Talk about real-world experiences – emphasize the value of group work.
- Use groups on a regular basis rather than sporadic use of method.

Off-task behavior: How do I deal with students who are engaged in off-task behavior?

- Structure the group activity.
- Apply time pressure.
- Control distractions (technology).
- Change roles to focus attention.
- Require a product (short-term and long-term).
- Use the technology back at them –send text messages.
- Physical presence of the instructor (e.g., stand next to person who is off-task).
- Assign "mini-goals" and have members e-mail instructor their progress.

- Verbalize where student should be in project based on time frames (expectations).
- Engage group in confronting off-task behaviors.

Different ability levels: How do I use group work in classes with students of very different ability levels?

- Identify a task analysis of skills needed and then assign roles.
- Talk about varying ability levels being a common reality in groups, acknowledge that, and ask groups to help resolve.
- Implement a variety of activities that will allow group members to bring different strengths.
- Assign roles so that all members are participating in the group process.
- Intentionally create heterogeneous groups to have natural tutors.

Members don't get along: How do I deal with groups that don't get along?

- Implement grading within groups—each member "grades" all other members of the group on the quality of their participation– "peer grading."
- Set up guidelines for conflict management within the group to help the group address their issues.
- Establish operational guidelines (e.g. no opinion is wrong, everyone gets a chance to participate).
- Require a group grade.
- Rotate group membership.
- Institute group "therapy" whereby the instructor works with "problem" groups.
- Incorporate team building activities.

For more information, please see Barkley, E. F., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. H. (2004). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*.

Or, contact Dr. Barkley at barkleyelizabeth@foothill.edu.

Mark your calendars for the 2007 *CCSSE* Workshop, to be held in conjunction with the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence (May 20-23, 2007) in Austin, TX. The *CCSSE* Workshop will be held on **Tuesday, May 22, 2007**. For more information about the NISOD International Conference, visit www.nisod.org.