

Creating Effective In-Class Group Assignments

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Supported by
IUSE Grant 1712295

The Challenge

To promote learning in student groups tasks must (1) deal with **intellectually important content**, (2) require **complex problem solving**, (3) draw on **diverse skills and perspectives**, and (4) require **positive interdependence and individual accountability**

An Example

As a newly registered voter, you have to make a decision on whether to vote for or against a repeal of the Affordable Care Act (i.e., "Obamacare").

Which is the most important economic concept to consider in your decision-making process before you vote?

- a. Asymmetric information
- b. Monopoly or monopsony
- c. Common resources
- d. Externalities
- e. Economies of scale

Team reporters must be prepared to defend their team's choice with economic reasoning!

(Adapted from an [activity by Carlena Ficano](#), Hartwick College)

Useful Resource on Group Learning

Journal on Excellence in College Teaching 25 (3&4): Special Focus Issue: Small-Group Learning in Higher Education—Cooperative, Collaborative, Problem-Based, and Team-Based Learning

<http://celt.muohio.edu/ject/issue.php?v=25&n=3%20and%204>

Creating Student Groups

- ✓ Instructor-created groups work best. Fosters diverse viewpoints on groups and minimizes friends assigned to the same team.
- ✓ Best size is 4-7 students. Large enough that diverse opinions are likely. Small enough that all students participate.
- ✓ Permanent teams are desirable. Once created, no need to do so each class session. Students learn to work together over time.
- ✓ Create positive interdependence and student accountability. Group tasks are challenging enough to need contribution from all students. Group scores based on randomly-selected team reporter only *after* task is completed.

"How-to" Guide

Our work in Team-Based Learning (TBL) offers lessons for creating effective group activities, whether as part of a whole-course pedagogy like TBL or used occasionally in a lecture-based course.

1. Identify the **desired learning outcome**. Based on the economic concepts students will have learned, what would you like them to be able to do?
Select the appropriate tool for analysis; Use a calculation correctly; Defend a policy position; Identify correct or incorrect use of a concept
2. Based on this outcome, what is a **significant problem** that students can study?
A decision in their personal lives; A policy choice under current debate
3. Optional: What material should students **prepare before class** to provide them with sufficient information about the issue?
Watch a news clip; listen to a podcast; read a periodical article
4. Create **specific choices** for the problem. This will focus the group's attention and force them to come to agreement on one best answer
Which is the best (or worst) policy choice? Which concept is most (least) relevant for making a decision? Who will be most (least) affected?
5. How will teams **report their answers** and how will the instructor follow up on their choices?
Teams report their answers simultaneously, thus avoiding one team copying another. Because teams worked on the same problem and likely have different answers, inter-team debate is promoted. The instructor can prompt this debate. Afterward students will be primed for a short lecture that identifies key issues, possible errors in student thinking, and economic lessons to be learned.



 **Starting Point:**
Teaching and Learning Economics

Application Exercises

Help
Results 1 - 10 of 146 matches

[Fair division in upgrading internet service.](#)
Michael Levine, San Bernardino Valley College

In this exercise students will consider two roommates who have the opportunity to purchase a shared (public) good, upgraded internet speed. Students will discuss the appropriate division of the cost of the good. In ...
Economics Topics: Additional Topics: Other, Microeconomic Topics: Public goods, Game theory

Group Assignment Library

<https://serc.carleton.edu/econ/tbl-econ/activities.html>

Refine the Results ↓

Economics Topics

Microeconomic Topics [80 matches](#)
Macroeconomic Topics [44 matches](#)
Additional Topics [50 matches](#)