

An Examination of an Effective Peer Evaluation Process

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This student, peer evaluation process for mid-sized groups was developed to allow for assessment of individual performance in a high-stakes, team project. The objective is to ensure, as much as possible, the grades being assigned are being earned.

The authors of this paper have worked together for over twenty-five years in the cornerstone program of the Indiana University Kelley School of Business's undergraduate program at the Indianapolis campus. The group project in this program determines 20% of each student's grade in four different courses. The authors have experimented with various methods of assessing individual performance in group projects. While we do not claim to have 'the answer', we have developed a process that is equitable, encourages student growth and accountability, and attempts to minimize bias and personality conflicts in assessment.

Implementation. At the beginning of the semester, this process and the potential impact on course grades is clearly explained. The importance is reiterated throughout the semester. This helps to ensure that students understand the importance of individual performance during the project. The process is still developing and, as in any good process, will continue to evolve. The latest iteration sought to ensure group members were addressing issues within the group and gave group members a chance to better their performance. The process consists of four steps: a Team Charter, a mid-term peer evaluation, the final peer evaluation, and an appeal process.

Value. Based upon attendance at various conferences and discussion with colleagues, the process being submitted seems to be the most comprehensive and equitable that we have encountered. Numerous colleagues from across the nation have requested this process.

Student Response. In a survey completed at the end of the Fall 2019 semester, the vast majority of students (>90%) recommended no changes and commented that it provided a basis for useful discussions, and provided a fair and equitable assessment tool.

Limitations. If students choose their own groups, are in small groups (three or less), or completing low stakes assignments, this process would likely not be as effective.

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AN EXAMINATION OF AN EFFECTIVE PEER EVALUATION PROCESS

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Instructors constantly balance achieving learning objectives with expediency. In-depth assignments with detailed feedback can be especially challenging for instructors with heavy teaching loads. In such situations, a common way of dealing with this balancing act is to use teams or groups to work on assignments. This makes the grading manageable and provides benefits to students. We know that students learn from other students, learn more as they explain their thoughts to the other students, and learn valuable lessons on working with different types of thinkers and personalities. There are many positives to doing group work. For low stake assignments, group assignments work very well. As the stakes increase, new issues emerge. Specifically, there tends to be at least one student in each group whom the others feel does not contribute as much; the quality and quantity of work performed is not equally distributed. In an effort to ensure that individual students are fairly graded for the quantity and quality of their individual contributions, peer evaluations are often used.

Peer evaluations cause mixed opinions among instructors. Their concerns are rooted in their experiences. We are sharing our experiences in the hope of making a needed tool more useful. Criticisms and concerns regarding the use of peer evaluations include

- 1) Students won't downgrade each other; they want to be liked – **False** especially in high stakes assignments. In low stakes assignments, this concern is probably true. In our specific situation group size is five to six students. We assign the groups to ensure diversity. If students choose their own groups and/or are in smaller groups (3 or under), this concern may be valid.
- 2) Evaluations perpetuate biases and prejudices – **True** which makes it imperative that an evaluation process has multiple check points and opportunities for confidential communication with the instructor
- 3) There is not a 'fair' way to apply – **False**. While there is always room for improvement, having a documented process in place, including an appeal process, allows for fair assessment
- 4) Instructors are to assess student learning; a student should not have an impact on another students' grade – **False**. If a student is not doing their share of the work they are impacting the others in their group. The evaluation is more of an accountability tool than an assessment tool.

The authors of this paper have worked together for over twenty-five years in the cornerstone program of the Indiana University Kelley School of Business's undergraduate program at the Indianapolis campus. The group project in this program determines 20% of each student's grade in four different courses. The groups are formed the third week of the semester and the students work on the project until final submissions and presentations during the last week of the semester. It is a very high-stakes assignment. As students must receive a C or better in all four courses before being allowed to take upper level courses, it is imperative that students are not passed through who do not understand or cannot use the material.

Peer evaluations are used to ensure, as much as possible, the grades being assigned are being earned. The authors have experimented with various methods of assessing group performance and while we do

not claim to have ‘the answer’, we have developed a process that is equitable, encourages student growth and accountability, and attempts to minimize bias and personality conflicts in assessment.

The process is still developing and, as in any good process, will continue to evolve. The latest iteration sought to ensure group members were addressing issues within the group and gave group members a chance to better their performance. The process consists of four steps: a Team Charter, a mid-term peer evaluation, the final peer evaluation and an appeal process.

Team Charter – one of the first tasks each team is assigned is to create a charter. This charter outlines team expectations and consequences for non-compliance. (Appendix A, page 4)

Mid-Term Evaluation – this evaluation is given online via Qualtrics. Students use a drop down box to state two positive attributes about each team member, and two areas of improvement. This information is tabulated into a chart and shared with the team. This is a good opportunity to ensure students are aware of possible areas of concern as well as providing a starting place for discussion. This peer evaluation does not have any impact on students’ grades. It is developmental only. In the online evaluation form there is also a confidential text box where students are to communicate any concerns they may be seeing or experiencing that they feel the professors should know about. This evaluation could be done with a hard copy but due to the large numbers of students in our program, the online version is much more manageable. We also tried not using a drop down box and letting students use their own words. The time it took the instructor to tabulate the results was unreasonable. (Appendix B, page 5)

Final Evaluation – at the end of the project, the students complete individual, confidential evaluations. Each student provides a score for each team member, 0-100%. If any team member does not receive 100%, the student must document why the downgrade was given and what they personally did to address the issue. If no documentation is provided or if the other team members did not address the situation with the individual, that downgrade is not considered. A majority of the team must have downgraded a team member for any official downgrade to occur. The evaluation scores for each team member are averaged, including their self-assessment, and the four instructors discuss if any additional modification is warranted. The final evaluation score is applied to the team grade to determine individual scores. For example, if the team received a project score of 90% and Student’s average evaluation score was 80%, Student’s project grade would be 72%. (Appendix C, page 6)

Appeal Process – if a student feels they were unfairly downgraded, an appeal process is available. This process has multiple steps and takes an average of six weeks which is the downside to the process (Appendix D, page 7)

Throughout the semester, teams are provided with resources to work through issues. An instructor, who teaches Team Dynamics and Leadership, is available to meet with group members individually and collectively.

The objectives of the peer evaluation are to ensure credit is given as appropriate and also to guide students in dealing with issues involving other people. This is an important life lesson as well as a professional one. For instructors, it is important to accept that we will never achieve 100% effectiveness as students still make their own choices. The process we have outlined in this paper has worked for most students, has allowed us to identify situations where there seems to be unfair biases or collusion, and let us fairly distribute credit earned.

APPENDIX A: TEAM CHARTER

Using the blog article, “7 Components of an Actionable Team Charter” by [Redbooth](#) (2016) as a guideline, the teams create a team charter. All information discussed in the article should be included in the team charter as well as anything else they think is necessary based on course readings, class discussions, and the dynamics of their team. They can pick the formatting for the charter but it should be clear, easy to read, and follow the written work guidelines in the syllabus. *(This description and a subsequent assignment reflects the work of Dr. E. James Flynn, Prof. Charlotte Westerhaus-Renfrow, and Prof. Michelle Clemons, all from the Kelley School of Business, Indianapolis)*

APPENDIX B: MIDTERM PEER EVALUATION

Name

Team

Section

Teammate #1 (repeated for each teammate): Overall, I would rank their performance as _____.

Answer options: very satisfactory, satisfactory, unsatisfactory

Teammate #1 (repeated for each teammate): Pick 1-2 strengths for each team member, including yourself. This information will be combined with the input of your teammates and then shared with your team.

A list of options are given

Teammate #1 (repeated for each teammate): Pick 1-2 areas of improvement for each team member, including yourself. This information will be combined with the input of your teammates and then shared with your team.

A list of options are given

Please provide any general feedback you would like to share with your team. This feedback should be concise, respectful, grammatically correct, and relate to your team charter.

A text box is provided

Please list any feedback or specific examples that you feel the I-Core faculty should know regarding your team and team members. This feedback should be concise, respectful, grammatically correct, and relate to your team charter. This will not be released to your team.

A text box is provided

What have you done to make your team inclusive? This response should be concise, respectful, and grammatically correct. This will not be released to your team.

APPENDIX C: FINAL PEER EVALUATION

CONFIDENTIAL
INTEGRATIVE CORE PROJECT PEER EVALUATION

Team Number _____

Member's Name _____ (print)

This procedure provides a means for each individual in a group to evaluate the participation of the other members of the group. Its primary purpose is to **encourage all group members to fully participate** in the completion of the project. This evaluation will be used to adjust downward the project grades of students whose contribution is significantly below the average of other team members. How you are evaluated by your peers may, therefore, result in your receiving a lower grade for the project than the project, itself, was awarded.

Inherent in the idea underlying Peer Evaluations, we expect that you will be fair in assessing the contributions of the other group members. We all have different sets of strengths and weaknesses. The question is "Has each individual tried his/her best?" In other words, be realistic in your expectations of others.

Having said this, it is certainly acceptable for you to expect that group members will have attend all meetings (barring unusual circumstances) and will participate fully in all discussions and decisions. In other words, if you, as an individual, end up with primary responsibility for drafting the marketing part of deliverable 3, this does not mean that you have no responsibility for fully participating in the other phases of preparing the deliverables and the presentation. Below, list the names of each member of your team, **including yourself**. Based on contribution to the team effort, give 100 points to each member, including you, who carried his or her share of the work and contributed adequately to the project. Any team member who did not participate fully should receive less than 100 points. For example, an individual who did virtually nothing would get zero points; one who did about half of the others' individual work would receive 50 points.

This evaluation is confidential, so **do not discuss this evaluation with anyone!** Only the grading instructors will read it, and its contents will be held in the strictest confidence. Print your team number and name at the top of this form, sign the evaluation (at the bottom), and return it in a sealed envelope at the conclusion of your team's presentation. The project report is not complete without all team members' peer evaluations.

Name of Team Member	Points
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____

Comments (Required if you assign less than 100 points to a team member. Use the back of this sheet. Fully explain your reasoning including actions you and your team took, during the semester, to resolve the situation. For scores of less than 100, if no comments are provided, then your score will be changed to 100. If there is no indication of actions taken to resolve the situation, then your score will be increased half-way towards 100.)

(signature)

APPENDIX D: APPEAL PROCESS

A student who received a peer downgrade from their team will receive the following message:

Your group's final project grade is XX. Due to peer evaluation concerns, your final project grade is XX. While this may be upsetting to you, please consider the view of your teammates and assess whether or not you contributed as much to the project, with cooperative behaviors, as your teammates. If you feel that the evaluations do not accurately reflect your contributions, you may initiate the appeal process. The process does take 6-8 weeks. To initiate the process, you must contact Prof. Donahue, the I-Core Coordinator, at kdonahue@iu.edu, between May 18th, 2020 and June 1, 2020. If you do not use the provided email or contact her outside the provided dates, your appeal will not be pursued. You may NOT discuss this issue with ANYONE (teammates or others) until the appeal process has been resolved.

There is a mandatory waiting period between the posting of this message and the first date for filing an appeal. This forced waiting time gives the student time to see the impact, if any, this has on their final course grade as well as allowing for a cooling off period to eliminate knee-jerk reactions.

When a student does initiate the process, they receive an email to their official school email explaining the process and giving them two weeks to determine if they'd like to continue with the process. The process is described below.

1. Once the student initiates the appeal process, they will receive a message outlining the appeal process and an attachment that includes a summary of the concerns expressed by members of their project team (To comply with university privacy policies, they will not see the actual peer evaluations.)
2. If they wish to pursue this matter further, they must then send a written appeal that addresses these concerns. This appeal should not just state that they do not agree with these concerns. As explained in point 4, this written appeal is shared with the appellant's teammates.
3. During the appeal process, **they must not have any communications with their team members regarding the appeal.** *Doing so could void their right to the appeal.*
4. After receiving the written appeal, a message will be sent to those team members who had concerns with the student's performance asking them to reconsider their evaluation of said performance. They will be given a copy of the written appeal. They will be asked to consider the appeal statement as evidence warranting reconsideration. While the other team members are not required to change their evaluations, they must read the appeal statement and respond with their individual decisions.
NOTE: Since the initial part of this process is asking the other team members to re-evaluate the student's performance, the appeal statement should be written with this in mind. The appeal is to team mates, and not to faculty, at this point in the process.
5. When the responses are received, the student will be notified of changes to the final score, if any. If a team member does not reply, their score will automatically be changed to 100%. If a team member lowers their initial score, it will be ignored.

6. At this point in the process, there will be an automatic review made by a member of the faculty who is familiar and experienced with this program but who did not teach this section. They will then be given copies of all of the correspondence for their review. Their recommendation, to stay with the score the team gave, or to make adjustments due to mitigating circumstances, will then be sent to the faculty of record. They may accept or reject the recommendation.

7. After this review is completed, a report will be sent to the student giving the results of the faculty's decision.

8. If the outcome of this review is not to the student's satisfaction, they can then pursue an academic fairness committee hearing through the Kelley School of Business's offices