
Real problems encountered by instructors in a first year PBL course (for discussion during break-out groups)

Theresa Winchester-Seeto, Macquarie University
twinches@laurel.ocs.mq.edu.au

Please consider the following for your designated scenario:

- What are the options/alternatives to solving this problem? (Note: Each scenario has implications for assessment, but is the solution found in tackling assessment or group management strategies, or a combination of both?)
- What are the advantages and disadvantages for each option?
- Which one is favoured by your group?

Breakout group scenarios :

1. Susan is a student whose mother has been progressively failing with cancer; she is an active member of the group throughout the first half of the semester, but becomes increasingly more distracted (understandably) in the second half and contributes less and less to the group effort. Finally, in the middle of the third project the student withdraws from the course, and does not fulfil her obligations and research the area designated to her, nor does she hand in her part of the project. How can this be handled without disadvantaging the other students in her group?
2. Felicity is a student who is a working mother, studying part-time and finds it difficult to meet outside of class time. Other members of her group are impatient with these “excuses” and she is perceived to be a “free-loader” by the group.
3. Marie is an intelligent, hard-working student who has always received high marks for her work. Amongst her group is Fritz, a foreign student who is very excited about being in Australia and is very keen to experience all it has to offer. Fritz starts the course with little enthusiasm for the subject, but does the minimum the group expects of him. As the semester progresses, he does less and less and finally does not complete the research he agreed to do, and does not submit his part of the project. Marie is very concerned that despite her hard work, her marks will inevitably suffer because of the “free loader” in the group.
4. Paul is a student who is quite daunted by the prospect of group work and does not wish to participate. However, part of the course requires that he work as part of a group. How can he be helped, without disadvantaging any group he is placed in?