Grading Guidance for Team Leaders

Bass Connections projects offer faculty a unique opportunity to work collaboratively with students on an applied research project. As leaders of project teams, faculty can experiment with new pedagogical approaches, integrate new interdisciplinary angles into their teaching and research and develop a better understanding of how to organize and lead student teams. While this framework allows for experimentation and innovation, it can also lead to uncertainty about how to organize student tasks and assignments, set reasonable expectations for student work, assess student learning and develop a clear grading scheme that accounts for both individual and group work.

Because most students participate on project teams for credit *and therefore must receive a grade at the end of each semester of participation*, this guidance is meant to help team leaders identify common questions and issues around grading for project teams and offer a set of options for how to organize that process. While we understand that Bass Connections project teams are incredibly diverse, we hope these resources and tools can be used and *adapted* to fit the distinctive needs of individual teams. Team leaders are encouraged to reach out to their theme leader at any time to discuss grading approaches.

Common Considerations for Grading

Team leaders should be clear and transparent about how they plan to assess and provide feedback to students. Lack of clarity around expectations can frustrate students and may lead to issues around motivation, accountability and performance. We strongly suggest using our Project Goals and Expectations Template (or another document of your choice) to put your grading and assessment plan in writing.

When deciding on grading criteria, team leaders should aim to provide students with clear guidelines that communicate each component of the students' final grade and how that component will be evaluated.

Key questions team leaders should consider in their planning include:

- What types of assignments and teamwork behaviors will we evaluate, and how will we factor these components into students' final grades?

- How will we weigh individual versus group work?

- What timeline or methods do we want to use for providing instructor and/or peer feedback? And, will peer feedback be graded?

- In the context of a year-long project, how will we sequence assignments to ensure that we have something to grade in the first semester?

- How will we assess the effectiveness of group processes (including the nature of participation and decision-making) as compared to the quality of our team's products/outputs?

- What level of effort is reasonable to expect of our students, and how will we encourage and sustain student commitment and motivation?

Suggested Grading Components

While assignment types and timelines will depend on each team's research goals, **for the purposes of grading, team leaders may find it helpful to organize student work into three broad categories**:

1. *Research and process documentation*: including any assignment related to the ongoing process of cataloguing, describing and/or reflecting on the activity and workflow of the team. These assignments can be used to monitor and evaluate student progress and serve as important records of individual and team processes. Typical assignments may include research journals, blogs, portfolios, activity logs, progress reports and reflections. (See *additional guidance* on how to use reflections for student learning and assessment.)

2. *Teamwork*: including opportunities for peer and self-evaluations, as well as observations of teamwork behaviors as judged by team leaders. Peer and self-evaluations give students the chance to consider both their teammates' and their own contributions to the collaborative research process. When placed at strategic points throughout the semester, they can also provide team leaders with important indicators of team health and individual student performance. (See *additional guidance* on how to design and use peer evaluations.)

3. *Work products and accomplishments*: including project deliverables and milestone assignments, such as project plans, IRB proposals, literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, community-engagement plans, case studies, competitive landscape analyses, mock-ups, prototypes, data collection plans, surveys, datasets, policy reports, presentations, websites, exhibits, apps, pamphlets, final papers, etc.

Grade Breakdown Examples

Team leaders can use the three categories above as building blocks for determining student grades; however, **the grading breakdown will likely vary according to team goals as well as by semester.**

For example, in the **fall semester** when teams often spend a large portion of their time developing and refining their research question(s), creating a project plan and protocols and conducting background research and literature reviews, team leaders may choose to place more emphasis on research and process documentation and teamwork than on work products. In this case, *for example,* the core components of a fall grade might be:

- weekly research journal that includes responses to reflection prompts (35%)
- two peer and self-evaluations situated at the mid- and endpoints of the semester (30%)
- needs assessment survey draft; stakeholder interviews; and team-written community engagement plan (35%)

In the **spring semester** when teams are finalizing deliverables, teamwork and work products might carry more weight*. For example*, the core components of a spring grade might be:

- weekly research journal that includes a final reflection on the research process and team experience (15%)
- two peer and self-evaluations situated at the mid- and endpoints of the semester (30%)
- shareable dataset and final report, team-written pamphlet and final presentation to a project partner (55%)

Weighing Individual vs. Group Work

Though these three categories can provide a broad structure for grading, team leaders must still consider whether, how and when to weigh individual learning and performance against that of the group.

When considering group "performance," it is also important to have a realistic understanding of what success might look like. If the research project is new and innovative, team leaders should leave space for failure, learning and the re-working of project goals or key deliverables.

Because part of the goal of Bass Connections is to help students learn to become effective members of a research team, part of each student's grade will ideally be based on their contribution to the group and the group's overall performance. However, **team leaders should seek to find a grading breakdown that both reflects their goals for individual student learning and serves to motivate students** (including those who are worried about their final grades being tied to the efforts of others in the group).

Using the fall semester example above, here is one way to incorporate individual and group grades:

Component	Assignment	Type of grade	Grading breakdown	Percent of final grade
Research/process documentation	Weekly research journal + reflections	Individual	Individual: 100%	35%
Teamwork	Peer and self-evaluations (x2)	Individual + Group	Individual: 60% (student's assessment of her peers) Group: 40% (student's peers' assessment of her)	30%
Work products/ accomplishments	Team-written needs assessment survey	Group	Group: 100%	10%
	Individually conducted stakeholder interviews	Individual	Individual: 100%	10%
	Team-written community engagement plan	Group	Group: 100%	15%

There are many other ways to break down individual and group grades, including by adding an individual component to a group-based assignment. For example, in the case of the team-written community engagement plan above, team leaders might ask each student to be responsible for a different component or section of the document, while the entire group is responsible for the introduction, the editorial process and the quality of the final product. Individual sections might then receive an individual grade (40%) that can be factored into the group grade for the entire document (60%).

Work products/ accomplishments	Team-written community engagement plan	Individual + Group	Individual: 40% (evaluation of student's unique contribution) Group: 60% (evaluation of community engagement plan as a whole)	15%

To underscore, these are simply *options to consider.* Every team will need to design a grading scheme tailored to the goals of their team.

Expectations for Student Effort

While Bass Connections project teams are not standard courses and have unique requirements, you should expect students to commit about the same amount of time to your project team per week as they would a course – roughly 12 hours/week. You should also expect students to commit to your project team for the entire academic year (i.e., both the fall and spring semesters). On occasion, however, there are legitimate reasons why students may need to leave the team after the fall semester (e.g., scheduling conflicts).

When students are thinking about joining a project team, we advise that they:

- Plan to commit two semesters and approximately 12 hours/week to their project team
- Talk with their advisor(s) to understand how participating aligns with their degree requirements
- Understand the requirements and expectations of a project before applying
- Are prepared to actively participate in all team meetings and activities over the course of the project
- Are prepared to grapple with ambiguity and a dynamic research landscape