

## 2009-2010 Seminar Participants

### "Effective Use of Teams in the Classroom"

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#### *Rationale:*

Before beginning at Stonehill this Fall, I had taught my own classes for five semesters. As I've transitioned from the larger classrooms of the University of Maryland to the more intimate classes at Stonehill, it has become clear that there are some different skills necessary to excel in smaller classrooms, particularly, the successful use of teams. I am using teams in my Organizational Behavior class this semester, and can see a clear need for a more deliberate well-formed strategy to maximize student learning and growth through the team experience. I can see in my students' journals regarding their team experience that there is room for significant improvement.

#### *Project Description:*

Teamwork skills are considered a critical competency in modern business (de Janasz, et al., 2006; Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008), and are one of the specific learning goals of the business department. I believe the best way to develop teamwork skills is to learn how teams function from theoretical and empirical perspectives and personally apply that knowledge to actual teamwork.

Because my knowledge of team functioning and teamwork is somewhat limited, my proposal has two parts - a more broad information gathering component, and a tentative specific topic.

The first part of my proposal is to read to literature on the use of teams in the workplace and classroom, to form a well-informed theory and strategy for their use. I will also apply the principles from literature and best practices from industry to better use and manage teams in my classroom in order to help develop better functioning teams and to encourage the growth of team building skills in my students.

The specific platform for this is my teams project in Organizational Behavior. The second part is a tentative focus on learn to help students develop teams that are "high functioning," in a specific way. I have had many discussions with other faculty about the "dark side" of the very distinctive "niceness" of Stonehill students - their inability or unwillingness to engage in constructive conflict with their peers. A characteristic of high functioning teams is engagement in functional task conflict while avoiding excessive personal conflict (de Janasz, et al., 2006). I have noticed in my current class in my students' journals that they are very reticent to disagree in any way, and it appears to have caused wasted time and suboptimal outcomes in their projects. Therefore, the more specific goal for my project is to determine how to effectively structure student teams and what information to convey so that the students begin to engage in constructive conflict within their teams.

### *Benefit:*

One clear benefit of my participation in the seminar will be increased student learning and effectiveness as teammates, which again is considered a critical competency in organizations. Secondly, developing teamwork skills is a formal learning goal of the business department, and improving students' learning and development in this area will be an important step in achieving that learning goal.

### *Community Outreach Plan:*

My plan is to formally share my findings with the other two instructors of organizational behavior. I plan to write up how the team project was integrated into the class, and what strategies I used to help the teams become high functioning in general, and specifically to engage in functional conflict. Between the three of us we reach all business majors, which are a substantial portion of Stonehill's student body, allowing this project to have broad impact on the teamwork skills of Stonehill graduates.