



Brenau University  
Learning Teams  
Policies and Procedures Manual

This handbook provides recommended practices for faculty, staff, and students in developing and conducting courses in a study team format. Information is considered current and reflects Brenau policy based on the date of publication. Comments and recommendations for improvement should be directed to the Office of Adult and Graduate Studies.

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE LEARNING TEAM

Adult learning theory suggests that adults are collaborative learners. Research indicates that a good learning team is a key to student success in adult education. Students in small teams encourage and affirm one another throughout the program. By pooling their talents in a learning team, students can take on larger projects than would be possible as individuals. This model supports the university's ability to present courses in a compressed format and still accomplish course objectives. Communication and teamwork skills are also enhanced through the learning team process.

The five assumptions underlying collaborative learning describe the adult learner as someone who

- has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning;
- has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning;
- has learning needs closely related to changing social roles;
- is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge; and
- is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Merriam, 2001).

In traditional learning environments, students assume a relatively passive role. By contrast, the learning team process demands active participation by students in their educational development and places greater responsibility for knowledge and skill acquisition on the learner.

Learning teams are expected to meet for four hours once a week during an enrolled course.

Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory*. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, v. 89, p. 3-14.

## LEARNING TEAM FORMATION

Academic Advisors will form learning teams prior to the initial meeting of the first course for on ground cohorts, and faculty members will form learning teams for online courses. All subsequent faculty members in each program may keep or form new learning teams as needed. Students should always keep in mind that their initial teams may not be permanent and that faculty members may form specific project teams at any time.

Each team's first meeting should consist of a dialogue on the specific obligations and responsibilities of each member, which will form the content of the team's *Constitution of Expectations* (see following pages). All students in a team must agree to abide by the *Constitution*. If at any time during the program a student fails to abide by the *Constitution*, he or she may face disciplinary action by the other members of the learning team in ways defined by the *Constitution* and implemented through the process described in this manual.

Three to four students per team is optimal, partly because this size allows permanent or drop-in learners to smoothly enter and exit a learning team when necessary. Every learning team must have at least three members (if course enrollment permits) and no team may include more than five students. Sharing responsibility, establishing goals, and utilizing complementary skills are accomplished best in a team of three to four members.

From time to time, due to new members being added to courses either as drop-ins or as permanent transfers, teams will need to be reformed. The reforming process should be systematic so as to avoid conflict over inclusion. When new students join a learning team, either as drop-ins for a single class or as permanent

students, they should be assigned to learning teams in a rotating manner. If at any time, a learning team falls below three members, the cohort will need to reform their learning teams to absorb fellow students. New *Constitutions of Expectations* must be created for each group affected by change in membership.

Each team will appoint a learning team facilitator. This representative is responsible for monitoring adherence to the team's goals, purposes, and basic operating procedures.

## **FACULTY MEMBERS ROLE**

Generally, the faculty member should avoid interfering in the dynamics of the learning team. The faculty member is responsible for establishing a positive tone, monitoring implementation, and guiding the group process. Students will take their responsibilities more seriously when they understand the importance of group learning. A positive tone about the potential of learning teams must be set by the faculty member during the first class, and this affirmative attitude must be expressed by each faculty member throughout the program. Positive reinforcement of learning goals is the key to consistent performance by learning groups.

Group performance must also be monitored. The faculty member must provide direction on tasks and specify expectations and guidelines for performance without dictating group activities. A clear understanding of group goals and expectations assists in the monitoring process. The faculty member needs to track group progress to ensure that

- groups follow a realistic schedule;
- group performance is not sidetracked by conflicts;
- group members contribute to the accomplishment of tasks in a positive manner.

## **TEAM MEETING LOCATIONS**

Learning teams must take place at an approved site. Approved sites include

- classrooms and learning team rooms;
- corporate meeting rooms;
- Brenau Trustee Library
- affiliated off-campus locations (including public libraries);
- virtual meeting spaces (include chat rooms, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, e-mail).

Approval will be given to locations other than those listed above, but only if they are conducive to learning. Instructors have the authority to give university approval to sites. Approval must be received before any meeting takes place and all sites must be acceptable to all members of the learning team, and specified in the learning team plan. Locations that are considered conducive to learning must have the following characteristics

- individual seating for each learning team member;
- a desk or flat surface area for each learning team member;
- adequate lighting;
- a quiet area with no ambient noise, such as loud music;
- adequate temperature control;
- electrical and phone service to allow students access to the University's library services;

- adequate restroom and parking facilities and accessibility.

## GROUP RULES

Rules must be established within each learning team and articulated in the *Constitution of Expectations*. At the beginning of each project, individual roles and responsibilities must be clearly identified. Clear direction reduces student anxiety and lessens the likelihood of problems within the group.

Everyone in the group must agree on an agenda to meet the project's goals and must collaboratively determine a project calendar. This gives group members a clear vision of the tasks to be completed and of the deadlines that must be met. A calendar also assists in setting up future meetings. Once a calendar is agreed upon, it is more likely that students can work individual schedules around group meeting dates. A standard group meeting time should be set so that individuals can plan their long-range personal planning around the group meeting schedule. Participation by everyone within the learning team is necessary if the group is to achieve its best performance.

Team behavior standards should describe acceptable and unacceptable practices in response to assigned work, meetings and task completion (e.g., all team members must be prepared to discuss the topic at hand and arrive promptly at 6:00 p.m.). Standard practices and expectations for team work must be clearly defined by each team.

A section of the *Constitution* must outline in detail penalties for failure to adhere to acceptable practices and behaviors within the learning team. For example, if a student misses one meeting, he or she will be marked absent. If a student misses all meetings and does not complete his/her work, his or her name will be deleted from the learning team assignment. A pattern of failing to help with assignments will allow the team to dismiss the member from the team. A pattern of abuse regarding team policies is considered more than a one-time offense. Team members should first discuss issues with the offending team member(s) and thereafter document learning team abuse for the next course.

Learning team plans should include all acceptable modes of contact including meeting location, day of the week and starting and ending times. Students may utilize a combination of face-to-face communication and technology to accomplish learning team tasks.

If new students are permanently assigned to a team, the team must reformulate their *Constitution of Expectations* to integrate the opinions of the new members.

Conflicts and disagreement are common and healthy within any small group, and should be expected from time to time. How a group deals with such conflict reflects the measure of maturity of the group as a whole. All students should remember that these teams are intended to be active learning communities that focus on outcomes and projects, not personalities. Each team should outline the process for managing conflict in the *Constitution of Expectations*.

## **LEARNING TEAM EVALUATIONS**

At the conclusion of each course, students are provided the opportunity to evaluate their own and other team members' performance. Faculty members may use this evaluation as a portion of the student's final grade for a course. Learning team members should use the Learning Team Evaluation Form as the mechanism to standardize the evaluation. This form is best completed outside of class and provided to the faculty member when requested.

## **TEAM PRESENTATIONS: GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

Team presentations are fairly common because all members can receive recognition and share all the work that team members accomplish. The guidelines below are adapted from *Guide to Managerial Communication* by Mary Munter, 1992, published by Prentice-Hall.

- organize as a whole;
- provide clear transitions between speakers;
- use visual aids consistently;
- rehearse as a team;
- deliver as a team;
- answer questions as a team.

## **WRITING IN TEAMS**

- agree on the process first;
- discuss your strategy and organization;
- conduct research;
- draft the document;
- revise the document;
- submit the document.

## **REFERENCES**

Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 3-13.

Munter, M. (1992). *Guide to managerial communication*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall.

## Attachment A. Constitution of Expectations

The purpose of the *Constitution* is for learning team members to articulate what they expect from each other. It is an ongoing contract designed collaboratively by each team. Students will be learning and growing throughout the program, so teams should feel free to amend the *Constitution* as needed and submit it to the instructor for university records.

Each learning team should appoint a learning team facilitator. This representative is responsible for monitoring adherence to the team's goals, purposes, and basic operating procedures.

List the learning team goals and purposes (e.g., We want to serve as a support system for each other; We want to learn how to improve our presentation skills). Each team should develop a minimum of five goals.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

List the basic operating rules for team members to follow, including expectations for communication and individual contributions to team assignments (i.e. research, analysis, draft preparation). Consider each student's strengths and skills needing development (e.g., Student A will be responsible for the literature review).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

List the basic behavior standards for the learning team. Define unacceptable behavior, and describe how conflict will be addressed (e.g., A student who misses more than one learning team meeting will have their name deleted from the project.).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Attachment B. Learning Team Plan

### Learning Team Plan

(Effective [insert date])

Please complete one Learning Team Plan per project. For the meeting location, identify where the team plans to meet, keeping in mind that the location must be conducive to learning. A copy of the plan must be submitted to the course instructor after the first learning team meeting.

Meeting Day and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signatures:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

This learning team plans to meet in a (check one)

Classroom  Study room  Library  Corporate meeting room

Online  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Facilitator Signature                      Facilitator Name (print)                      Date

## Attachment C: Learning Team Peer Evaluation Form

Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Use this form to evaluate each member of the learning team, including yourself. Place names of the team members in the horizontal boxes and then in the vertical boxes immediately below the team member name, place a numerical value relating to the statement on the left hand side of the evaluation form (1 through 4, with 4 indicating you strongly agree with the statement).

The form is designed to help you and your teammates meet the expectations of the team as defined in the *Constitution of Expectations*. It is extremely important that you seriously, thoughtfully, and respectfully discuss the cumulative results of the evaluation within your group.

1=Strongly disagree      2.=Disagree      3=Agree      4=Strongly agree

<b>Name of Learning Team Member</b>				
<b>Preparation</b> Team member was well prepared., had completed all research, reading and assignments				
<b>Attendance</b> Team member arrived on time and stayed for duration of the meeting				
<b>Participation</b> Team member actively participated in meetings and contributed to the learning process				
<b>Interpersonal Relations</b> Team member maintained a positive and productive relationship with all team members				
<b>Between Meeting Communication</b> Team member initiated communication and responded appropriately				
<b>Overall Contribution Score</b>				

Individual Questions for Reflection (use back of sheet if needed)

1. What are the most important concepts you have learned from the learning team experience?
2. How will you use this learning to improve both personally and professionally?
3. Please provide any other comments you may have regarding learning team members and activities.