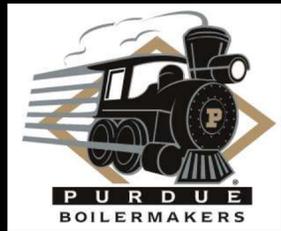


Strengthening team facilitation & communication skills of upperclassmen through collaborative responsibilities in a freshman Animal Sciences Orientation class

Abstract
#248

Poster #33

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Objectives of this poster are to assist NACTA attendees in better understanding:

- 1) how to measure the confidence and competence of the teaching assistants, and
- 2) how to maximize the effectiveness on the student population being served.

Course Description

This Animal Sciences Orientation course included approximately 160 students during 2009 and 2010. The main learning objective of the course is to increase knowledge of, interest in, connectedness with, retention in, and ultimately enhance career success in animal sciences. The class meets twice a week for 75 minutes during the first eight weeks of the spring semester.

This freshman retention seminar includes student panels, guest speakers combined with class activities on Mondays, a two-day industry trip, and each freshman must meet with their team once weekly. The class relies heavily on the teams and their activities to accomplish its goals. Team facilitators are expected to facilitate discussion of seven animal industry and personal development topics.



Team Facilitators:

The 20 team facilitators in 2009 and the 35 in 2010 were selected from applicants who had completed the course, were upperclassmen in good standing, and had demonstrated group leadership. Two training sessions we conducted in late autumn, and weekly support e-mail communications were conducted. The average team size was reduced from 5.2 in 2009 to 3.6 in 2010.

Roles of the team facilitator:

lead one team per week
Mentor – encourage, care about, assist, and provide direction
Enthusiasm
Professionalism & represent the Department
Punctuality and missing- be early, don't miss, responsible for finding your replacement –
Communicating with course leadership
Paperwork, grade reporting and ...
Setting boundaries & team ground rules



Methods of Assessment:

- 1) we assessed the self-perceived confidence of the team facilitators with a self-assessment survey instrument similar to that of Ball & Knobloch, 2008
- 2) we assessed the observed competence and effectiveness of the team facilitators on the population served through student course evaluations.
- 3) Focus group discussions with the team facilitators was conducted after the completion on the course both years.



Results:

The student course evaluation reflected the following: With 1.0 being best on a 1-5 scale, team facilitator effectiveness was ranked at 2.8 in 2009 and 1.75 in 2010. Of 20 course assessment items, the highest results were in "My team facilitator was an effective discussion leader" (1.67) and "My team facilitator made a positive impact on my course experience" (1.65). Effectiveness was higher at 3-4 team members when compared to 5-6 team members. 89% of the freshmen intend to stay in touch with their team facilitator and students reported an average score of 1.93 in response to "This course encouraged me to pursue a career in animal sciences".

Self-Perception of facilitators:

With 1.0 being best on a 1-5 scale, Team facilitators reported that they gained skills in group facilitation
Skills in inclusion of all members of the team
Comfort in communicating with all members of the team
Gained confidence in handling the details and management of the team and grading
Gained practice managing those who choose to dominate conversation in a small group
Learned more about the content of the industry topics discussed/led

Focus group discussions led to:

Group size dramatically influences discussion dynamics
It is difficult to let discussion flow when topic is foreign to students
Communications between class leadership is critical
Some struggled to sustain interaction between all members of the team

Discussion:

More time was taken by staff in managing the undergraduate team facilitators than not
The teams must be consistently discussion the same topics for the exercise to compliment the course.
More prepared and trained team facilitators will be more effective and confident
It appears that having enough facilitators to accommodate 5-6 member teams is ideal
The more you expect of the upper class facilitators, the more they will do



Summary:

The staff can benefit the learning objective of the students and the leadership development of the team facilitators but both must be learning objectives about which the staff is passionate.

The involvement of undergraduate team facilitators added value to the freshmen experience and just as importantly strengthened the team facilitator's confidence leading teams.