Editing by Steven Dilley for review by other subcommittee members

New or revised material is in brackets.

Student Group Work Guidelines – Phase 1
Draft #2 – February 11, 2002

Group Work Sub-committee Members, 2001-2002:
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Background:

During the 2000-2001 academic year, the University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP) was asked by the Provost to develop a set of recommendations (faculty guidelines) regarding criteria for group projects and grading at MSU[1]. The need for guidelines has emerged in the context of an increasing use of group assignments, coupled with a growing recognition of a need for additional faculty and student guidance concerning the structure, process, and evaluation of student group activities. At the UCAP meeting of September 14, 2000*[1],* UCAP members outlined several dimensions relevant to the Provost's charge concerning guidelines development for student group work: (1) student evaluation in group assignments; (2) how to establish group projects for greatest effectiveness; and, (3) effective use of groups in the classroom.

At the UCAP meeting of October 25, 2001, additional discussion occurred concerning the specific charge to the UCAP Group Work sub-committee for this year. UCAP members concurred with a recommendation for a two-phase approach. Phase 1 will involve generating some general faculty guidelines for development of syllabi concerning criteria for group projects and grading, and is envisioned to be a short-term project. Phase 2 will involve developing a set of more detailed guidelines concerning sound pedagogical approaches to group work, and is envisioned to be a longer-term project. The draft guidelines that appear below are intended to address Phase 1 of the charge to the committee.

Group Work Guidelines (Draft #1):

[Introduction – The increasing use of group work in MSU classes has prompted the issuance of these general guidelines. These guidelines are advisory, not mandatory, and are intended to help MSU faculty with the structure, process, and evaluation aspects of group work. Useful websites that contain pedagogical materials on this topic include the following: (insert some websites).]

Structure – *How to establish group projects for greatest effectiveness.*

[Course Planning – Factors relevant to group assignments.] In course planning, faculty ~~should give~~ *[might consider the following factors: (1)]* careful advance consideration ~~to the~~ *[of*

the] circumstances in which student learning is likely to be best fostered by an individual or a group approach*[;]. ~~Course syllabi should contain~~ [(2)]* clear statements *[in the course syllabus]* about the intended purpose(s) of assignments, which are explicitly linked to both class and course objectives*[;]. ~~[(3)] W~~[w]*here appropriate the rationale for the choice of learning approach (individual or group) ~~should~~ *[might]* be included in course syllabi*[; (4) potential concerns of students about the implementation of group assignments ~~should~~ [might] be explored and addressed in course planning; and (5) students ~~should~~ [might] also be provided with detailed information in the course syllabus for how they can contact the appropriate course faculty later on, for any additional questions or concerns about their assignments.]*

[In addition, course syllabi ~~should~~ might include information about the specific steps students can ~~or should~~ take to address problems in accomplishing either individual or collective tasks for group assignments. Where appropriate, relevant timelines for student actions ~~should~~ might be included. Where appropriate, the range of possible steps that faculty may take to address problems ~~should~~ might also be specified.

[Detailed Expectations.] Expectations for what students are to do for group assignments ~~should~~ *[might]* be specified in a sufficient level of detail in course syllabi, and linked to behavioral outcome criteria, such that *[un]*reasonable ambiguity regarding the tasks to be accomplished by students is reduced or eliminated. The expectations ~~should~~ *[might]* be stated in terms of what students are to do both individually and collectively, *[thereby]* explicitly relating the expectations ~~back~~ to the intended purpose(s) of the assignment.

[Course Orientation Discussion] Expectations for group work ~~that are described in course syllabi should~~ *[might]* be reviewed with students as part of course orientation activities, and ample opportunity *[might be]* provided for students to ask questions to clarify the written expectations. ~~ Potential concerns of students about the implementation of group assignments should~~ *[might]* ~~be explored and addressed in course planning. Students should~~ *[might]* ~~also be provided with detailed information in the course syllabus for how they can contact the appropriate course faculty later on, for any additional questions or concerns about their assignments.~~ *[This material was moved into "course planning" above]*

~~Course syllabi should include information about the specific steps students can or should take to address problems in accomplishing either individual or collective tasks for group assignments. Where appropriate, relevant timelines for student actions should be included. Where appropriate, the range of possible steps that faculty may take to address problems should also be specified.~~ *[This material was moved into "course planning" above]*

[Contracts with Students.] ~~As appropriate, c~~[C]*onsideration* ~~should~~ *[might]* be given to use of either informal (verbal) or informal (written) group contracts, specifying the individual contributions of group members to the project. The procedures for use of contracts and copies of any forms to be used ~~should~~ *[might]* be included in the course syllabus.

[Training in Group Work.] Training in general concepts and specific skills for group work

~~should~~ *[might]* be provided for students as part of any course activities that include group work, taking into account the nature of the group assignment(s), and the developmental phase, level of educational attainment, and motivational level of students. Commonly-occurring issues in the context of group activities ~~should~~ *[might]* receive special attention; e.g., group conflicts about how to do tasks, assertiveness and communication skills, strategies for dealing with individuals who do not meet their group obligations, etc.

Process – Effective use of groups in the classroom

[Student Work Expectations.] Expectations for how students are to work individually and collectively in groups ~~should~~ *[might]* be specified in a sufficient level of detail in course syllabi, such that reasonable ambiguity regarding expected work processes is reduced or eliminated.

[Monitoring Process.] Faculty ~~should~~ *[might consider assuming]* ~~assume~~ primary responsibility for implementation of an adequate monitoring process for group work, that is well-matched to the specific group assignment(s), the context of instruction, and which holds individual students and groups of students fully accountable for meeting expectations for group assignments. Information about the monitoring process, relevant timelines, and contingencies ~~should~~ *[might]* be included in course syllabi, and reviewed with students as part of the course orientation. The faculty monitoring process does not preclude assignment of students to share responsibility with faculty for monitoring group processes.

[Factors Affecting the Monitoring Process.] The context of instruction ~~should~~ *[might]* receive careful consideration in course planning for group assignments; e.g., the size of the class, level of students, type of class content, etc. In instances where it may not be feasible to implement a fully sufficient monitoring process for a given type of group assignment within a given course, one or more of the following strategies ~~should~~ *[could]* guide course activities involving group work, as appropriate: (1) a type of group assignment ~~should~~ *[might]* be made for which it is feasible to have a sufficient faculty monitoring process; (2) student grades, individually or collectively, ~~should~~ *[might]* not be ~~penalized~~ *[adversely affected]* on the basis of the outcomes of the group assignment; or, (3) consideration ~~should~~ *[might]* be given to use of individual assignments in place of group assignments, as appropriate.

[Checking the Value of Group Work.] When feasible, principles of evaluation research ~~should~~ *[might]* be incorporated into *[the]* course, going beyond measurement of end-of-course outcomes only. For example, baseline (pre-course) and interim (in-course) assessments of student knowledge of, skills for, and motivation for group work could be done, and faculty approaches adapted accordingly during the course of the semester, based on assessed student needs. The interim assessments may be incorporated as part of a group work monitoring process.

Evaluation – Student evaluation in group assignments

[Individual Contributions to Group Assignments.] Course syllabi ~~should~~ *[might]* contain a

detailed description of how students will be evaluated and graded on the basis of their individual contributions to group assignments. Group assignments ~~must~~ *[might]* be structured so that the contributions of individuals can be evaluated in a sufficient, valid fashion.

[Peer Evaluation.] As appropriate, student peer evaluation data may be considered by faculty members in assigning grades for group assignments. Course syllabi ~~should~~ *[might]* include a description of how faculty will use student peer evaluation data in faculty evaluation and grading of students. The contributions of students to peer evaluation ~~should~~ *[might]* be clearly described in course syllabi, including copies of any forms to be used. Procedures ~~should~~ *[might]* be outlined in course syllabi for how discrepancies in peer evaluations are to be resolved.

[Faculty Evaluation.] Faculty ~~should assume~~ *[have]* ultimate responsibility for the evaluation and grading of students on group assignments. ~~In no instances should s~~*[S]*tudents *[should not]* be solely responsible for evaluating other students ~~on~~ contributions to group assignments, nor should students be *[solely]* responsible for assigning grades to other students.

[Caution for New Projects.] Newly-implemented group assignments merit special caution in student evaluation and grading. Especially for untested group assignments, faculty ~~should~~ *[might]* give careful consideration to the weight of these assignments in individual students' course grades.

[Student Feedback.] Student input about group learning experiences ~~should~~ *[might]* be sought on end-of-course measures of satisfaction and learning. The measures ~~should~~ *[might]* include standard SIRS forms, but may also include Unit or faculty-developed measures that are ~~tailored to (~~more sensitive~~)~~ to outcomes for specific courses. Planned evaluation research *[that links course objectives to group assignments]* is desirable~~, in which~~ ~~the target outcomes of the course are linked to structure and process elements of group assignments,~~ as a more objective ~~means to~~ *[way of]* evaluating the usefulness of group assignments.

[1] Per Section 4.5.4 of the Academic Governance Bylaws, UCAP advises the Provost on policy related to methods and evaluation of instruction.