

Group Projects in Large and Small Classes

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Individual accountability is often viewed as an obstacle to group learning techniques. We have developed procedures for group projects that include individualized components for large (ca. 500) and small (ca. 50) non-majors introductory biology classes. Projects for the large class focus on library research while an experimental approach is required in the smaller class. In each case the students are provided with a step-by-step outline which necessitates individual contributions as well as group effort.

The projects have been received with a great deal of enthusiasm and have replaced the traditional laboratory report in our large class. Students in groups of three choose their own topics and each student gives a combination oral/poster presentation on one aspect of the topic at the end of the semester. The combined presentations must provide a cohesive overview of the topic.

The projects for the smaller class provide an occasion to “do” science and have resulted in a better understanding of, and appreciation for, science and its methodology. The student teams present a group-designed poster and each student gives part of an oral presentation at the end of the semester. In addition, each student completes a group evaluation form which includes estimates of each member’s contribution.