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Can They Work Well on a Team? Assessing Students' Collaborative Skills

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Comments

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CAN THEY WORK WELL ON A TEAM?
ASSESSING STUDENTS' COLLABORATIVE SKILLS

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"Being civil and working well with others? That's essential. I've let
     experienced attorneys go, not because their legal work is poor, but
     because they are hard to work with, don't treat the staff with respect, and
     make others miserable." – Comment from the supervising attorney of a
     legal practice group to the author, March 31, 2011.

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the many critiques of legal education are criticisms
that law students do not graduate with effective emotional
intelligence skills—in particular, they have not learned to work well
with others. Working with others is an important legal skill;[1] and as

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    1.   Nearly twenty years ago, the American Bar Association's *MacCrate Report*
identified collaboration as a fundamental skill for effective lawyering: "In order to
organize and manage legal work effectively, a lawyer should be familiar with the
skills, concepts, and processes required for efficient management, including . . .

law practice increasingly relies on collaboration among lawyers, legal staff, clients, and other individuals, so have legal employers raised the demand for effective collaborative skills among law students and recent graduates. Correspondingly, leaders within the legal profession have decried lawyers' lack of civility and respect,[2] which are essential to working with others and developing as a professional.[3] Many legal educators recognize this need,[4] and seek to improve students' collaborative skills in courses with enrollments

cooperation among co-workers." AM. BAR ASS'N SECTION OF LEGAL EDUC. & ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR, LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—AN EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM, REPORT OF TASK FORCE ON LAW SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSION: NARROWING THE GAP 199 (1992) [hereinafter MACCRATE REPORT]. The *MacCrate Report* also emphasizes "including systems and procedures for . . . [c]ollaborating with other attorneys in the same office or other offices." *Id.* at 201. More recently, legal educators and others have confirmed "the ability to work effectively as a member of a team" as an essential professional skill for lawyers. ROY STUCKEY AND OTHERS, BEST PRACTICES FOR LEGAL EDUCATION 77 (2007); *see also* Marjorie M. Shultz & Sheldon Zedeck, *Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admission Decisions*, 36 LAW & SOC. INQUIRY 620, 629 tbl.1 (2011) (identifying the twenty-six factors for lawyer effectiveness, five of which include listening, organizing and managing others (such as staff/colleagues), seeing the world through the eyes of others, building relationships with clients, and developing relationships within the legal profession). The need to work well with others has also been proven essential to effective leadership. DANIEL GOLEMAN ET AL., PRIMAL LEADERSHIP: REALIZING THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 255–56 (2002).

2. *E.g.*, Tim A. Baker, *A Survey of Professionalism and Civility*, 38 IND. L. REV. 1305, 1306 (2005); Susan Daicoff, *Lawyer, Know Thyself: A Review of Empirical Research on Attorney Attributes Bearing on Professionalism*, 46 AM. U. L. REV. 1337, 1344 (1997) (referring to the decline in civility and courteous conduct between lawyers as evidence of the erosion of professionalism in lawyers over a period of twenty-five years). An online survey conducted by the Indiana Bar Association in 2004 showed that 43.1% of respondents had a negative impression of lawyers. *Id.* Comments from respondents showed several themes, two of them being that lawyers do not return telephone calls or care about their clients. *Id.* at 1312.

3. *See* Sophie Sparrow, *Practicing Civility in the Legal Writing Course: Helping Law Students Learn Professionalism*, 13 L. WRITING: J. LEGAL WRITING INST. 113, 117–31 (identifying components of civility and the benefits for students in learning and practicing these skills).

4. *E.g.*, WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN ET AL., EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW 145 (2007) ("[Legal education is] severely unbalanced, . . . [and that] the relentless focus . . . on the procedural and formal qualities of legal thinking . . . is sometimes to the deliberate exclusion of the moral and social dimensions and often abstracted from the fuller contexts of actual legal practice."); Melissa H. Weresh, *Fostering a Respect for Our Students, Our Specialty, and the Legal Profession: Introducing Ethics and Professionalism into the Legal Writing Curriculum*, 21 TOURO L. REV. 427, 435 (2005) ("[F]ew would dispute that instruction in the areas of ethics, professionalism, legal analysis, and written communication [is] essential, if not the bare minimum, [to] a legal education.").

of about twenty or fewer students—usually clinics, seminars, practical skills courses, and writing courses. In these courses, demonstrating effective interpersonal skills is often one of the named behavioral learning objectives, and teachers may evaluate these skills in determining students' final grades.[5]

Even when they agree that having law students develop effective collaborative skills is an important learning objective, many colleagues believe, however, that teaching and assessing students' collaborative interpersonal skills is impractical.[6] Several assumptions are embedded in this view: only the teacher can assess student performance, accurately assessing students' interpersonal skills is impossible in a class of over thirty students, having students work on their interpersonal skills during the course will force teachers to significantly reduce the amount of substantive material they can teach, and assessing the effectiveness of students' interpersonal skills requires too much subjectivity to be valid. Each of these assumptions has been effectively challenged by teachers who use the strategy of Team-Based Learning.[7]

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5. For example, when I taught first-year legal writing, one of the course goals was for each student to "[p]articipate as a professional with classmates, teaching assistants, guests, staff, and faculty." More than ten percent of a student's grade was based on my evaluation of their professional engagement, which included treating others with respect, being prepared, listening to others, and helping others learn. Sophie M. Sparrow, Legal Writing Course Description and Class Materials (July 2009) (on file with author).

6. I use the term "colleague" to refer to law professors I have spoken with at the University of New Hampshire School of Law and other law schools in the United States and overseas. Over the last ten years, I have had multiple conversations with colleagues attending teaching conferences and workshops. These include those sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools (AALS), such as its annual and mid-year meetings; the Institute for Law Teaching and Learning; the Legal Writing Institute; the Association of Legal Writing Directors; the Society of American Law Teachers; and many other law teaching conferences. Colleagues at many schools complain about students' lack of professionalism and are interested in how to teach and assess these skills. When explained that this can be done, the comment is often along the lines of, "Yes, but perhaps only in a small seminar class."

7. Team-Based Learning is a transformative teaching strategy that engages students in working through complex problems throughout the course. A full discussion of Team-Based Learning, which has been applied to classes with hundreds of students and includes a fundamentally different approach to designing a course, is beyond the scope of this essay. Readers who seek to implement Team-Based Learning should consult TEAM-BASED LEARNING: A TRANSFORMATIVE USE OF SMALL GROUPS IN COLLEGE TEACHING 28 (Larry K. Michaelsen, Arletta Bauman Knight & L. Dee Fink eds., 2004) [hereinafter TEAM-BASED LEARNING]; TEAM-BASED LEARNING: SMALL-GROUP LEARNING'S NEXT BIG STEP (Larry K. Michaelsen, Michael Sweet & Dean X. Parmelee eds., 2008) [hereinafter

This essay will focus on ways to engage students in collaborating and assessing that collaboration effectively. Students' interpersonal collaborative skills can be effectively taught and assessed in large doctrinal classes by including effective collaboration as a course learning objective, enlisting students to establish assessment criteria, providing students with multiple opportunities to collaborate, enabling students to get feedback on their skills in working with others, and using students' experiences to gather data about their classmates' skills. I have been using collaborative learning for over a decade and, in the last five years, in classes of over seventy students. Using the teaching strategy of Team-Based Learning,[8] I have students work in permanently diverse groups, provide student groups with regular opportunities to interact and work together on significant problems, engage students in giving and receiving feedback about their collaborative skills, and count effective student collaboration as a percentage of students' final grade. While I still have much to improve on, I have found that this approach for using and assessing student collaboration works for almost all students.[9]

II. IDENTIFYING COLLABORATION AS AN IMPORTANT LEARNING OBJECTIVE AND ESTABLISHING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

At the beginning of each course, I ask students to develop a list of criteria that will help them work together, explaining that we will be engaging in a lot of collaborative learning during the course. Although I include and briefly describe "professional engagement" in the course syllabus, and name it as an important learning objective, I want students to identify the specific attributes of what

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TEAM-BASED LEARNING: NEXT BIG STEP]; TEAM-BASED LEARNING COLLABORATIVE, http://www.teambasedlearning.org (last visited Dec. 3, 2011). These sources provide a wealth of information, forms, videos, and materials about this teaching strategy.

8.   *See* sources cited *supra* note 7.

9.   Team-Based Learning is effective for many students who note the value of this approach in their end-of-semester course evaluations. For example, in responding to the question, "What was your favorite aspect of the course?" students make comments such as, "The group work was beneficial—it's definitely important to know how to work with other people since we will need to do that in practice." And, "My team was excellent to work with. I really enjoyed discussions and projects." Each semester, however, when asked, "What was your least favorite aspect of the course?" a few students respond along the lines of, "[T]he teamwork portions" and "Team-based learning." Sophie M. Sparrow, Final Course Evaluations (May 2011, Dec. 2010, Dec. 2009) (on file with author).

that phrase means. Most law students quickly and easily identify attributes of effective collaboration, such as treating others with respect, listening, being prepared, communicating with colleagues, and contributing to group discussions. This is not surprising; they have experience working with groups, both good and bad. They have played on sports teams, had leadership roles in extracurricular activities, and devoted themselves to helping their classmates and members of their communities. I ask students to identify the criteria for effective collaboration because I want them to see that they all recognize its importance in their community, and I want to acknowledge their expertise. I also want them to see that they are empowered to set behavioral standards for themselves and are accountable to each other; I do not want them to see professional collaboration as something they do because I, the teacher, told them to. I also want to give them practice in naming what will help them work effectively with others. I want students to build confidence and develop competence in working effectively as soon-to-be lawyers.

I provide students with illustrations of the importance of effective collaboration in the workplace by referring to professional literature[10] and stories from lawyers. I also inform them about the value of team learning, and how this approach has resulted in better learning in other disciplines.[11] In addition, I emphasize that in teaching a course, such as Torts, my job is not just to teach them the law of torts, but how to solve torts problems the way lawyers would. Because lawyers need to work effectively with others to succeed in practice, students need to practice these skills to prepare for their future careers. Accordingly, in class, they will be placed in permanent groups or teams, and will work with their teammates in almost every class. This mirrors what they will do in practice: they will likely work with various committees, practice groups, and work teams during their careers on a variety of goals. In their future careers, each group they work with will have a complex mix of personalities, tasks, and challenges. Being attorneys who are considered leaders and effective team players will

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10. MACCRATE REPORT, *supra* note 1, at 201; STUCKEY AND OTHERS, *supra* note 1, at 77; Shultz & Zedeck, *supra* note 1, at 629.

11. Frank J. Dinan, *An Alternative to Lecturing in the Sciences, in* TEAM-BASED LEARNING, *supra* note 7, at 103 ("These studies showed that the team-based learning classes consistently obtain statistically higher mean and average grades than do the lecture students.").

help them in their chosen profession.[12]

One of the students' first jobs as a team is to identify the guidelines for effective collaboration. These guidelines, I explain, become the criteria for grading their teammates at the end of the course, and they have opportunities to revise these guidelines during the course. To educate them about what other students have done, I provide them with a list of examples from previous teams, such as "communicate immediately about problems," "share the workload," and "allow everyone to speak."[13] Working in diverse teams of five to seven, students quickly establish a minimum of three written guidelines that will apply to their team and their team only. At the beginning of the course, these are often quite general, with many teams identifying similar guidelines, such as "treat everyone with respect." Other teams set guidelines that included the points, "Be on time. Be prepared. Be polite and open to ideas. Give notice if going to miss a meeting." Another team included, "Don't be afraid to ask questions, [k]eep criticism to the constructive type, . . . [d]iscuss potential problems early." Both teams further agreed that if team members did not meet the guidelines, the consequence would be to "Buy coffee for Team."[14]

About a month into the course, I invite teams to revisit their guidelines, reminding them that the goal of the team is to help each other learn. I invite them to consider refining their collaboration guidelines to be more specific, adding new guidelines to address actual or anticipated problems, and adjusting the guidelines to reflect their greater understanding of their teammates and course team assignments. They are also asked to revisit their guidelines because, as I tell them, I have observed that the professional behavior and collaborative skills they identified so quickly and easily at the beginning of the course may become harder to follow later in the semester. Faced with significant stress, mandatory grading curves, and a highly challenging learning

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12. Teams work effectively when they focus on a common goal. In practice, groups work together to address clients' legal issues; in the educational environment, teams work together to help each other learn. Having á common goal helps "ensure that the entire team places *extra* emphasis on a single area of priority, so that when push comes to shove, everyone understands what matters most." PATRICK LENCIONI, OVERCOMING THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM 137 (2005).

13. Some of these student comments are illustrative of general comments received over the years of using the approach of Team-Based Learning.

14. Sophie M. Sparrow, Team Guidelines Developed by Students in a First-Year Course (Aug. 30, 2011) (on file with author) [hereinafter Team Guidelines].

environment,[15] law students' collaborative skills may fade. The true test of skill, I explain, is performance under pressure. If they can collaborate effectively while in law school, they will be better equipped to do so in practice.

At this point in the course, many students elaborate on their team guidelines. For example, "communicate with teammates" becomes "respond to emails promptly" and "tell teammates in advance if you know you are going to be late."[16] Similarly, students refine, "be prepared," adding "have written notes on the questions and be ready to explain your analysis of assigned problems."[17]

During the course, students are given several other opportunities in class to revisit and revise their team guidelines. After they have given each teammate feedback about the teammate's performance in following the guidelines and, in turn, received their teammates' feedback about their own performance, they often further refine the guidelines. For example, one team added, "don't hide behind the laptop," when members of the team realized mid-semester that most of them were bothered by a teammate who always looked at his screen instead of making eye contact during team discussions. Similarly, after they have had trouble working on a significant team assignment, teams revise their guidelines to fix the problems, such as including criteria like "be open to others' suggestions" and "admit when you are wrong."[18] Before the end of the semester, all teams have established the criteria by which they will hold each other accountable and which they will use in allocating points that factor in to their final grade.

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15. Many authors have noted the extremely stressful environment of law school and its effects on students. *See, e.g.*, Gerald F. Hess, *Heads and Hearts: The Teaching and Learning Environment in Law School*, 52 J. LEGAL EDUC. 75, 77 (2002) ("Symptoms of psychological distress included depression, obsessive-compulsive behavior, interpersonal sensitivity (feelings of inadequacy and inferiority), anxiety, hostility, paranoia, and psychoticism (social alienation and isolation)."); Lawrence S. Krieger, *Institutional Denial About the Dark Side of Law School, and Fresh Empirical Guidance for Constructively Breaking the Silence*, 52 J. LEGAL EDUC. 112, 113 (2002) (noting that a significant number of Harvard Law School students become subdued or withdrawn as they progress through law school); Paula Lustbader, *Walk the Talk: Creating Learning Communities to Promote a Pedagogy of Justice*, 4 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 613, 623 (2006) (discussing the disrespect and lack of civility within law schools today).

16. Team Guidelines, *supra* note 14.

17. *Id.*

18. Sophie M. Sparrow, Team Guidelines Developed by Second and Third Year Students in an Upper-Level Elective Course (Mar. 2009) (on file with author).

III. PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE COLLABORATING

During the course, students work in their teams almost every class, spending the majority of the time engaging in team discussions, performing a range of tasks to develop deep learning.[19] Throughout the semester, teams may take quizzes together, evaluate responses and design solutions to hypothetical questions, give team presentations, design concept maps, draft documents, review and evaluate teammates' writing and performance, assess other teams' work, participate in simulations, and perform a variety of other tasks. By having multiple, varied opportunities to work on their learning together, students have more information on which to assess their teammates at mid-semester and at the end of the course.[20] They also develop a greater appreciation for their teammates' different contributions, enjoy increased opportunities to practice and refine strategies to resolve conflict, and hone collaborative skills for a variety of professional assignments.

In one course, a team of mostly third-year students elaborated on what they learned by having multiple collaborative assignments. They noted how valuable it was to see their teammates' writing, to which they had little exposure outside of their required first-year writing course. One student, who was at the top of his class and had excellent legal analytical skills, commented on how much he valued one of his teammates who contributed creative solutions of which he had never dreamed. Another student appreciated that one teammate excelled at facilitating team discussions. In other teams, once students had worked together on a variety of assignments, they recognized that the team was not working as effectively as it could and developed systems to manage effective

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19. Larry K. Michaelsen & Michael Sweet, *The Essential Elements of Team-Based Learning, in* TEAM BASED LEARNING: NEXT BIG STEP, *supra* note 7, at 7.

20. TRUDY W. BANTA, *Introduction: What Are Some Hallmarks of Effective Practice in Assessment?, in* HALLMARKS OF EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT 1, 4 (Trudy W. Banta ed., 2004) ("Effective *implementation* of assessment . . . [r]ecognizes that learning is multidimensional and developmental and thus uses multiple measures, therefore maximizing reliability and validity."); MICHAEL HUNTER SCHWARTZ ET AL., TEACHING LAW BY DESIGN: ENGAGING STUDENTS FROM THE SYLLABUS TO THE FINAL EXAM 155 (2009) (noting the need for multiple and varied assessments); LINDA SUSKIE, ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING: A COMMON SENSE GUIDE 38 (2d ed. 2009) ("Because each assessment technique is imperfect and has inherent strengths and weaknesses, collect more than one kind of evidence of what students have learned.").

collaboration. In some cases, teams assigned a different person to facilitate each class, required everyone on the team to contribute before any decisions were made, allowed any teammate to signal a "time-out" if the discussion became uncomfortable, or rearranged how they sat to maximize more effective discussion.

Having multiple opportunities to work together, students learn a great deal about their teammates and can adjust their approach to new tasks, tailoring their approach to the individuals on their team. Teams often develop collaborative strategies and refine their guidelines in light of their greater understanding of their teammates. For example, a team of highly extroverted, energetic students agreed that interrupting each other was acceptable behavior, contrary to the guidelines for every other team in the course. Similarly, a team that included bright but very quiet, deferential students agreed to have the quieter students start every discussion because the quiet students were most likely to accurately analyze a problem and least likely to interject their views if their teammates engaged in flawed analysis.

With increased exposure to collaborating with their teammates, students also design creative consequences for their teammates who fail to follow the team guidelines and identify ways for teammates to compensate for their lapses. Because one team prized individual preparation for class and high-level contributions during in-class team discussions, if a member of the team was absent, the rest of the team suffered. As a result, the team agreed that if a student on the team was going to be absent, that absent student had to contribute in advance and was required to email her written analysis of the readings and any assigned problems the day before.[21] This team's approach had several interesting

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21. Larry K. Michaelsen, who first designed the strategy of Team-Based Learning, explains that he tries to connect class attendance with what students will experience in the workplace.

> In the workplace, when someone is gone, the group has to pick up the slack but the absent member still benefits from the group work. If the absent person has a good reason for being gone, explains the reason to the group, and does their best to make amends, most groups will gladly extend the benefit. If, however, members have doubts about the reason for the absence, feel like the member is trying to freeload, or both, then the absence is likely to be a black mark that may not be forgotten when the peer evaluations come around. So, if you have to be absent, let your peers know in advance and make sure that you do your best to make up for it. Otherwise, you are at risk.

TEAM-BASED LEARNING, *supra* note 7, app. A at 221.

consequences. First, students who might otherwise be tempted to be absent quickly realized that it was more work to miss class than to attend. Second, the student who was absent often realized he learned more by having to prepare the material for others and that it took considerably more time and effort to prepare the class for his teammates. Third, other members of the team were now grateful when a teammate was absent, as they could use their teammate's work in preparing for class. Once the team adopted this policy, teammates were rarely absent. I have often seen teams design these kinds of creative approaches to make the team work together efficiently, coming up with solutions that are far more varied and effective than any designed for them by a teacher.

IV. PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH FEEDBACK ON THEIR COLLABORATIVE SKILLS

About halfway through the course, once students have been working together for about five weeks, they provide their teammates with feedback on how well each of their teammates is meeting their team guidelines. This feedback is anonymous. Each student completes a form for each teammate, including both quantitative and qualitative feedback. The quantitative feedback asks students to rate their teammate on specific tasks that are important for all students in the class, such as being prepared, being on time, asking useful questions, and giving useful feedback.[22] The qualitative feedback component asks students to name at least one thing that their teammate is doing well and one thing that their teammate could do to improve team performance and teammates' learning. Before students complete the form, we have a short class discussion about the challenge of giving and receiving this kind of intensely personal feedback. I explain why the skill of giving each other feedback on working together is important, giving the students examples about how, in practice, they will likely be asked to provide feedback and assess their colleagues and staff. I also give students examples of effective and ineffective feedback from previous classes, stressing that the goal is to help each of their teammates become even better at

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22. The *Team-Based Learning Collaborative* website contains a wealth of resources including forms, videos, and materials about this teaching strategy. *See* TEAM-BASED LEARNING COLLABORATIVE, *supra* note 7. A separate page focuses on peer evaluation, including sample forms and approaches. *Id.*

collaborating and helping each other learn.

Students are also directed to review their team guidelines and to rely on those criteria in assessing their teammates. The point here, made several times in the weeks before students engage in mid-semester feedback, is that no one should first learn about a problem from mid-semester feedback, and no one should be unfairly criticized for not behaving according to unidentified criteria. I also remind students that the reason they are working together is because they are more likely to learn more. When they provide their teammates with feedback, they should keep the learning goal prominent.[23] If a teammate is acting in a way that is adversely affecting their learning, they should be clear about what that teammate's specific behavior is, how it affects their learning, and what their teammate should do differently. Conversely, they should try to keep an open mind when they receive their teammates' feedback on their collaboration skills, viewing it as valuable information to use in helping their teammates learn.

Students complete the forms individually, out of class, and bring hard copies to class.[24] They distribute their completed forms in envelopes bearing their teammates' names. Toward the end of class, students are asked to open their envelopes in private, out of class, and give themselves time to absorb the feedback. Each student leaves with an envelope containing anonymous feedback from each of their teammates. I invite any student to meet with me individually to discuss any feedback, good or bad.

Getting the feedback can have a significant effect on team interactions. Some students are surprised that others want to hear from them more and want them to be more assertive. They work on developing confidence in expressing their thoughts during

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23. This is similar to what happens with teams or groups in practice. When teammates focus on accomplishing a goal, they are more likely to focus on how their teammates' behaviors help or hinder the team in accomplishing the goal efficiently and effectively. It also allows, and may be easier, for teammates to provide feedback without seeming to criticize their teammate. Instead, the focus is on how the teammate's behavior advances or detracts from solving the client's problem. Sometimes students will approach me before the midterm peer feedback is due, saying that they have nothing constructive to say about a teammate. When asked if the teammate is perfect, they often respond that they wish their teammate would contribute more, or take on more of a leadership role as the teammate is knowledgeable, approachable, and helps everyone learn. They then put those comments on their forms.

24. These can also be completed and uploaded to a website or e-mailed to the professor.

team discussions. Students who tend to be highly self-critical are relieved to hear that their teammates find them to be an asset. Some students become upset with the feedback they receive, particularly when it conflicts with their own assessment. For example, highly-verbal students may become angry when they learn that do not sufficiently listen to their teammates. Rather than using this feedback to learn how to become more effective in working with others, they may tell me that they only talk when others do not contribute, deny that they talk more than others, claim that they speak more often because their teammates do not understand the material as well as they do, or argue that their teammates just do not like them. Others realize that their perceptions conflict with the perceptions of their teammates; they work proactively with their teammates to help them identify their less helpful behaviors when they happen and practice behaving in more productive ways. After they give and receive feedback, many teams develop and refine their strategies of working together. As one student noted at the end of the course, "I realized that our team came together near the end. . . . I definitely saw an improvement in dynamics since the midterm because I took those reviews very seriously and as an opportunity to communicate my desire for our group to listen and communicate as a team."[25]

V. USING STUDENTS TO GATHER DATA ABOUT THEIR CLASSMATES' COLLABORATIVE SKILLS

At the end of the course, students again assess their teammates, applying their team's criteria to each teammate's overall course performance. In doing so, they are reminded that they have been working together for fourteen weeks and should use that data in their assessments. Each student receives a number of points per teammate and must distribute the total points among those teammates. If a student has contributed more than others on the team, they should reward that student by allocating more points to that student, and fewer to others. Conversely, if one of the members of the team has not followed their team guidelines and contributed less to their learning than others, they should allocate fewer points to that teammate and distribute the extras among other members of their team. They do not allocate points

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    25. Sophie M. Sparrow, End-of-Semester Peer Evaluation Comments (Dec. 2, 2010) (on file with author).

for their own performance. They are invited to provide an explanation for the scores they anonymously give their teammates, but, in general, they are not required to do so.

Students are allowed to distribute points evenly, but equal distributions are only accepted under certain circumstances. First, if they give each member of their team the same score, they must identify in writing how they arrived at that assessment. This means that it is more work for students to give everyone the same score, which reduces the chances of them taking the easy way out by just assigning the same number of points for everyone on their team. Second, students who want to allocate points evenly among their teammates must include specific descriptions about each teammate's contributions. These explanations must be sufficiently detailed and provide enough evidence for me to accept the equal distribution of points. If the explanation is insufficient, the student must either submit a different distribution or provide an improved explanation.

Students' final assessments and comments about their teammates' collaborative skills are fascinating. Many students note how much their team improved over the course of the semester, how much they learned from each other, and how much they valued their teammates' different perspectives. Other students include detailed observations about their teammates' performances over the semester. For example, a student wrote that a teammate "is very bright and picks up on material quickly. . . . [but,] I did not feel he was always adequately prepared for class and we had some attendance and participation issues with him during the team projects."[26] Or, "I gave everyone a score of [ten] because without the efforts of everyone on the team, we would not have been able to accomplish all that we did. While it is true that each team member has different strengths and weaknesses, everyone was present and contributing at all times."[27]

Once students have distributed their points, I average the scores for each student and use that as a starting point for assigning students' collaboration grades. I then review any comments made by their teammates and compare those comments with students' individual scores from my class observations. If there seems to be a discrepancy between my observations and a student's average score,

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26. *Id.*
27. *Id.*

I may ask that team to supply additional information about their team dynamics and revise the score as appropriate. How do students perform? According to their teammates, most students collaborate effectively, earning more than ninety percent of the points allocated for collaboration.[28]

VI. CONCLUSION

Assessing students' interpersonal skills can be done effectively and efficiently. By designing a course to promote student groups, making students accountable for individual and group performance, effectively forming student groups, and creating an effective grading system, law professors can help their students become more "practice ready." On the final team assessment, one first-year student wrote,

> Overall I am very happy with my team. At first[,] to be honest[,] I was very hesitant working in a group[,] and the first month it was difficult[,] I feel[,] for all of us to work together, but starting from the [first team project] and midterm evals [sic] the group did a 180 and we worked wonderfully together. Taking [team quizzes] we had a new format to make sure everyone got a say and not just [one] or [two] people ran the conversation. I felt people were more respectful and positive in class discussions, and working as a group outside of class was just the same. I am very happy with my group and think we all benefitted from it.[29]

A sixth-semester student who had considerable work experience before coming to law school had a similar response:

> Our group came a long way from the beginning of the semester, as we really did not know each other and had to learn to work together. We have come to respect each other in a way I would not have thought possible in January and to value what each person brings to the group.[30]

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28.   For example, in a class of over seventy students, students could earn up to fifteen points from the way their teammates assessed their collaborative skills. On the average, students earned 13.8 points, or ninety-two percent of the points they could have earned for their interactions with their peers. *See* Sophie M. Sparrow, Student Grades (Jan. 3, 2011) (on file with author).

29.   Sophie M. Sparrow, End-of-Semester Peer Evaluation Comments (Dec. 2, 2010) (on file with author).

30.   *Id.*