

## Forming Teams

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." --Michael Jordan

While looking ahead to the next semester, some of us may be considering using small groups in a more intentional way. While best known for "team based learning," Larry Michaelsen offers suggestions for forming effective teams that can work with a range of classes and instructional styles. Michaelsen suggests

- limiting groups to 4 to 7 members (enough human energy to complete tasks, but less room for slacking)
- making the groups permanent for the semester (an opportunity for students to work out their problems)
- forming groups of students who don't know each other well (a way to avoid existing conflicts and to give students an opportunity to meet new people)
- distributing resources evenly among the groups
- forming the groups yourself instead of leaving it to students

Let's look at the last two of Michaelsen's suggestions a little more closely.

When Michaelsen talks about dividing resources evenly, he refers to the practice of making sure the assets and liabilities students bring to the course are divided evenly among the groups. This involves considering the attributes needed to succeed in the subject and trying to distribute these among different teams, for example, creating teams with a mixture of majors/nonmajors, local/international students, high gpa/low gpa, student athletes, and first year students.

Clearly, groups that are shaped in these ways need to be formed by the instructor. Michaelsen suggests lining students up—either literally in the classroom or on paper—according to a key attribute they would bring to a group. For example, in an finance class required of all business majors I would have accounting and finance students stand up first, then students who are fluent in more than one language, next student athletes, then first year students, etc. until everyone is in a line. Students then count off so the various attributes are more or less evenly distributed among the groups. This process may sound more complicated than it is, as this five-minute video illustrates:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRNpaA8pU\\_0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRNpaA8pU_0&feature=youtu.be)

Want to read more?

Michaelsen, L. K. (2005). *Team-based learning: A transformative use of small groups in college teaching*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Oakley, B., Brent, B., Felder, R.M. & Elhaji, I. (2004) Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of Student Centered Learning* 2(1), 9-23.

[http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Papers/Oakley-paper\(JSCL\).pdf](http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Papers/Oakley-paper(JSCL).pdf)

--Tim Griesdorn (finance)