

BAKER UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL AND GRADUATE STUDIES  
**LEARNING TEAM HANDBOOK**

2010 Revisions

BAKER UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL AND GRADUATE STUDIES

# LEARNING TEAM HANDBOOK

Learning Teams: An Educational Technique that Works

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# OVERVIEW

## Introduction

Baker University's School of Professional and Graduate Studies (SPGS) recognizes the distinction between the typical college student and you who have assumed career responsibilities and have a need for continued professional development. Baker University has created courses to help you achieve your academic goals as you:

- enhance self-directed learning through the use of small-team dynamics.
- develop interpersonal skills needed for effective participation in small teams.

The learning team process encourages learning from each other by team inquiry and decision making. The concept of shared responsibility for learning and transfer of knowledge comprises an integral element of Baker University's School of Professional and Graduate Studies educational philosophy.



## Learning Team Purposes

There are many possible benefits from the learning team process. The following are considered to be most important in the team learning experience.

- **Build self-confidence as you strengthen your decision-making, problem-solving ability.**

Through active participation, you learn the dynamics of how a team makes decisions and solves problems. You will be encouraged to try different approaches to reach decisions that you might not attempt on your own.

- **Learn how to work with others under pressure.**

As you participate in learning teams, you become more comfortable with two kinds of pressure you may face in working with a team to accomplish a task:

The uncertainty or fear of working cooperatively with others diminishes as you increase your understanding of team dynamics.

You become more accustomed to the pressure of completing work by a deadline because the amount of work assigned and deadlines imposed mirror the results-oriented focus of the work environment.

- **Learn to lead and to follow others.**

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As feedback within the team makes you more sensitive to your own personal characteristics and behavior as well as those of others, you will gain self-understanding and achieve a greater capacity for self-assessment.

Less assertive team members will be encouraged by the atmosphere of trust in an effective learning team to take on a more directive, custodial role on occasions. The more assertive will learn that their success depends on the success of the entire team, and they will become more aware of the value of teamwork and joint effort in achieving goals.

- **Achieve a higher level of quality and performance in class projects.**

Your performance improves because you combine knowledge you already possess with what you learn from the others in your team as they share information based on their knowledge and experience. The pool of information is greater than you could acquire on your own.

- **Share teaching as well as learning responsibilities.**

Comprehension of conceptual material improves through team discussion. The interaction and involvement in asking and answering questions strengthens your understanding of the material. Those more knowledgeable about a subject gain new insights by sharing their knowledge; less knowledgeable members receive explanations and information that improve their understanding.

- **Develop interpersonal skills.**

By observing others' communication methods and by implementing a variety of interpersonal strategies yourself, you learn more about effective and ineffective behavior. These experiences help you improve your personal communication skills; strong communication and leadership skills are among the top requirements for career success.

- **Learn to work cooperatively.**

This should be the pattern developed in all learning teams. More ideas are generated through questioning and discussing, and decisions are based on more complete information. The presentation of the project will flow more smoothly when your team spends adequate time developing logical transitions among the individual sections.



- **Develop lasting relationships with peers that extend past graduation.**

Relationships among team members often develop beyond the objectives of the learning team. The most productive teams find they genuinely enjoy one another's company and they extend the working relationship to a social one. It is not unusual to find that members continue to maintain contact beyond graduation as a result of the friendships they have forged.

## LEARNING TEAM DYNAMICS

### Ingredients for Success

Successful learning teams share the following characteristics.

- **Clarity in team goals.** Ideally the team should
  - o be able to progress steadily toward completion of the project.
  - o be clear about the overall goal and about individual steps, meetings, discussions, and decisions.
- **Clearly defined roles.** Ideally the team should
  - o understand which roles belong to one person and which are shared.
  - o use each member's talents and involve everyone in the process.
  - o seek to develop and strengthen the experience of each member.
- **Clear communication.** Ideally the members should
  - o speak with clarity and directness.
  - o be succinct, avoiding long anecdotes and examples.
  - o share information, on many levels, on what you think, feel, observe.
- **Beneficial team behaviors.** Ideally the members should:
  - o initiate discussions and seek information and opinions.
  - o suggest procedures for reaching a goal.
  - o summarize the ideas presented by others.
  - o keep the discussion from digressing.
  - o help the team to agree on standards and policies.
  - o refer frequently to documentation and data.
  - o praise and correct others with equal fairness.
- **Well-defined decision procedures.** Ideally the team should:

- o discuss how decisions will be reached.
  - o explore important issues by polling.
  - o decide important issues by consensus.
  - o test for consensus by determining if the member can support the decision (consensus) or will not stand in the way of the decision (compromise).
  - o use data as the basis for decisions.
  - o write the decision making process into their constitution.
- **Balanced participation.** Ideally the team should:
    - o have reasonably balanced participation with all members contributing to most discussions.
    - o build on members' natural styles of participation.
- **Established ground rules.** Ideally the team should:
    - o have open discussions regarding ground rules.
    - o openly state or acknowledge norms if important deviations seem to be occurring.
    - o write their rules into their constitution.
- **Awareness of the team process.** Ideally team members should:
    - o be sensitive to non-verbal communication.
    - o see, hear, and feel the team dynamics.
    - o comment and intervene to correct a team process problem.
    - o contribute equally to resolving a process problem.
- **A logical, scientific approach.** Ideally the team should:
    - o ask to see data before making decisions and question anyone who tries to act solely on hunches.
    - o use basic statistical tools to investigate problems and to gather and analyze data.



# LEARNING TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

## Instructor

The relationship between you and the instructor for each class will be different from that in traditional institutions where the instructor imparts knowledge and students acquire it. You can expect your instructor to

- establish an environment that encourages positive feedback and creates mutual trust and support.
- give clear instructions on expectations, requirements, and performance standards.
- stress the relevance and importance of the learning team process to the particular course.
- serve as a sounding board about learning outcomes and the team process.
- seek and provide feedback on learning team processes.
- evaluate learning team and individual performance.

Your instructor may request that you prepare a Learning Team Meeting Summary (see sample in Learning Team Tools) or a similar instrument after each meeting and turn it in at the next class. Whether or not the instructor asks for the summary, completing it can help you focus attention on the process concerning assigned tasks.

Your instructor will require that you anonymously complete a Learning Team Evaluation Form (see sample in Learning Team Tools) to be submitted at the last class. This provides a confidential means to give your instructor feedback on your team's productivity and any problems with individual contributors. The instructor may also want to use the individual ratings as part of the grading criteria.

The decision of whether to include individual performance evaluations in assigning team grades is left to the discretion of the instructor. Examples of how instructors may assess your learning team contributions include

- weighing the team grade between 30% to 40% of the course grade.
- basing a portion of the team grade on your own evaluations of your team members and their contributions.
- determining part of the team grade on the quality of individual portions of the project.

It is your responsibility to discuss any questions you have about the grading process with the instructor for each course.



## Student

Baker University, your instructor, and your fellow students will have expectations of you in regards to the learning team process as well. You will be expected to

- join a learning team.
- commit to being an active member of the team and attend all classes and team meetings.
- work toward a positive, productive team experience and equitable solutions to team problems.
- when necessary and appropriate, inform the instructor of concerns about the performance of individuals or your whole team.
- commit to the successful completion of the project.
- maintain ongoing communication with team members.
- set aside personal agendas in favor of achieving team goals.

## LEARNING TEAM PROCESS

### Team Formation

During the first class, your instructor may lead you in get-acquainted activities. You may share information about experience, career field, education, and where you live and work. You will usually be expected to join with others to form a learning team by the end of the first course.

The following factors should figure in forming your team.

- The most successful teams are diverse in background and experience.
- Location and availability for meetings deserve consideration but should not be the major factors.
- Your team should have four to five members. Experience with learning teams has shown that they are most successful with four or five members. Learning modules are established with this number in mind.
- Teams with fewer than four members are less able to cope with the amount of work assigned and do not provide enough diversity. Teams larger than five become too cumbersome and difficult to coordinate.
- Although teams should be diverse in background and experience, they should agree on what they expect to get from their educational experiences — they expect to work hard and achieve high grades or they expect to “get through.” Discuss this issue with potential team members.

Once you have identified the members of your team, exchange names and telephone numbers and set up a convenient time and place for your first meeting. Teams always meet at least once a week.

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## Goals for Starting Off on the Right Foot

Following the steps listed here should help your team operate effectively from the beginning and remove some of the anxiety of working with a new team. At the first meeting you should

- get better acquainted with each other. Although you shared some information at the first class meeting, you may want to re-introduce yourselves. Much of the process of becoming acquainted will take place simultaneously with work on the project.
- discuss team roles and expectations. Tasks such as taking minutes, bringing minutes to each meeting, conducting debriefings, and computerizing data will need to be assumed by individual team members. At the first meeting you should identify things to be done and decide who will do what.

Maintaining a written record of assignments will help to keep the project on track and remind people of their responsibilities. Everyone needs to know who has agreed to do what and by when. If problems should occur with a non-contributor, this assignment list can serve as documentation of tasks the member agreed to complete but did not complete.

- establish an agenda and a calendar. Members need to agree on an agenda (see the sample Agenda in the [Learning Team Tools](#) section) to meet project goals and a calendar for meetings and for completing tasks. Setting regular team meeting times will make it easier for each of you to plan around them. If you are aware of any possible unavoidable conflicts with the team calendar, inform the others as soon as you can.
- establish the learning team ground rules. Write a **Learning Team Constitution** that outlines the rules that your team has established and agreed to abide by concerning the following areas:

Attendance: Place high priority on meetings, regarding them as nearly sacred. Discuss legitimate reasons for missing a meeting. Establish a procedure for notifying others if you cannot attend a meeting.

Promptness: Start and end meetings on time to lessen their impact on personal schedules.

Participation: Promote the need for everyone to speak freely and listen attentively.

Assignments: Much of the learning team's work is done between meetings. When you take on a task, be sure to complete it on time.

Meeting place: Agree on an appropriate meeting place accessible to all and conducive to working. Some team interaction may take place via computer. This provides an

alternative to face-to-face contact for communicating with each other and editing work in progress.

Conflict resolution: The team should acknowledge that conflict will be inevitable and determine a collaborative method of resolution. The method selected should help the team view the conflict as a mutual problem, promote an open exchange of ideas and opinions, encourage respect for the views of others, and support reaching a consensus.

Team evaluation: The team process needs to be evaluated regularly to attain the best performance. Conducting a quick debriefing at the end of each meeting will allow you to focus on what worked and what needs improvement. In addition, a post-mortem of the entire project may contribute to success in future teams (see the sample Process Check Rating Form in the Learning Team Tools section).

Individual evaluation: Everyone should understand from the beginning that you will be evaluating each other in terms of contributions and any problems. (See sample of Team Observations in Learning Team Tools.)



## Team Meeting Guidelines

Using the following guidelines will help your team hold effective meetings.

- Use an agenda, preferably one drafted at the previous meeting, and be sure that each member is aware of it (see Sample Agenda/Meeting Minutes in Learning Team Tools). List the following items at a minimum:

The agenda topics (what will be discussed and why) — The two following topics should be on the agenda for every meeting:

Agenda Review: Covered at the start of each meeting to add or delete items or modify times

Meeting Evaluation: Last agenda item, to discuss the meeting itself and the functioning of the team process. What worked and what didn't? What could be done to improve the next meeting? What substantive issues or tasks were dealt with? What issues were not resolved at this meeting?

A time guideline (estimate of the time needed for discussing each item)

- Take minutes and record the following:
  - o Key subjects, main points raised
  - o Decisions reached (including who has agreed to do what and by when)
  - o Items to be discussed or dealt with at a later time

- o Individual responsibilities (then complete the Action Items List and distribute by the person in charge of recording minutes — See sample Action Item List form in Learning Team Tools)
- Flip charts (newsprint-sized paper attached to a wall or an easel) are an effective way of taking minutes because your team can
  - o record information simultaneously with discussion.
  - o record exactly what was said.
  - o display where everyone can see.
  - o display minutes of previous meetings.

The value of flip charts over usual minutes consists of the following advantages:

- o They help members stay on track and quickly review what was said previously.
- o They have a strong ability to provoke memory so members can easily pick up where they left off.
- o Recording exact words presents ideas unfiltered by the attitudes, concerns, or interpretations of the recorder.
- o They save the time usually spent typing minutes and routing them to other members, a problem when teams meet every week.
- Draft the agenda for the next meeting at the end of each meeting.
- Follow the team's established ground rules to maintain progress toward goals.
- Allow time (10 to 20 minutes) at the end of each meeting to evaluate progress of team (See sample Process Check Rating form in Learning Team Tools).



# LEARNING TEAM CONFLICTS AND SOLUTIONS

## Common Conflicts

The following list includes several areas where learning teams often run into conflict. Some suggestions for overcoming these problems are also given. Although team members bear the responsibility for managing their learning teams, for additional guidance, talk with your instructor or Academic Advisor if your team consistently does not seem able to reach a consensus. Do not wait until the team has fallen apart before seeking help.

- **Team procrastination** occurs when teams struggle with starting projects, making progress, and completing projects on time. Recommendations include:
  - When beginning projects, brainstorm together to develop a shared understanding of the group's major goal, individual member task(s), and project timeline.
  - Emphasize clear and timely communication as members complete different aspects of the project.
  - Use meeting agendas and timelines to assist in critically examining how the project is progressing.
  - At each stage of project completion, review the overall project goal(s).
  
- **Imbalance of work or lack of participation** occurs when a team member(s) does not attend meetings, complete tasks as assigned or agreed to, or communicate with others effectively. A lack of work balance can cause functioning team members to do more work, and eventually they may resent the members who are not participating. Recommendations include:
  - Attempt to establish why the team member is not participating or not completing tasks as agreed to or assigned.
  - Using sensitivity, talk individually with the non-participating member to identify if there is a reason for the lack of involvement.
  - Be open, honest, and respectful in communications regarding imbalance of work or lack of participation.
  - Stress the importance of the "balance of participation" ground rule and of emphasize that everyone's contribution is essential to team success.
  - Review the guidelines for balance of work and participation set forth in your Team Constitution.
  
- **Unfocused team meetings** may occur when members are off-task or distracted. Team members may lose track of the meeting's purpose or want to avoid a sensitive topic. Recommendations include:
  - Review your team meeting space. If your meeting location is noisy, distracting, or is not conducive to learning or discussion, choose a new location.

- o Use a written agenda with time estimates for each meeting.
- o As a team, acknowledge that you may have a tendency to get off-track. Make a group effort to direct conversation back on track as tactfully as possible.
- **Frustration between team members** may occur when team members assign motives to the actions of others without investigating why an individual(s) may be reacting in a certain way. Recommendations include:
  - o Be open, honest, and respectful in communications regarding individual motives and why certain reactions/behaviors occur.
  - o Ensure that in discussions, all team members have a chance to listen, ask questions, and explain their points of view.
  - o Emphasize the team's standards for acceptable behavior, compromise, and the effort to create harmony amongst team members.
- **Dominating or overbearing behavior** may occur if individual(s) control meetings, behave in a domineering manner, or discount/ ignore the opinions of others. Dominant behavior can occur when team members fail to give credit to another's opinion or to react to it at all. Recommendations include:
  - o Create time limits during meetings for individual contributions.
  - o Support ignored team members or ideas without taking sides.
  - o With sensitivity, talk privately with the dominant person(s), suggesting that it may be useful for them to listen to the ideas of others. Concerned members should select one member to talk to the offending individual in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way.
- **Personality conflicts or disagreements** between team members may disrupt the team's ability to function successfully and meet project goals. Specific conflicts may be best dealt with outside of team meetings. Recommendations include:
  - o Review the guidelines set forth in your Team Constitution.
  - o Encourage the conflicting members to discuss the issues privately.
  - o Ask the team members to develop ground rules as an addendum to the Team Constitution regarding acceptable guidelines for behavior.

## Resolving Learning Team Conflicts

In the case of a conflict, the learning team members should follow the steps listed below:

- Review the Learning Team Constitution to see how the team agreed to handle the unacceptable behavior or performance.
- Discuss the unacceptable behavior or performance with the team member as soon as it is noticed, and explain how the behavior or performance conflicts with the team constitution. He/she may not realize how his/her actions affect the learning team.

- Identify the desired performance outcome and communicate that expectation with the disruptive team members, including the time frame and what steps will follow if the team member is non-compliant
- Document (in writing) details of the interaction including the performance expectations, outcomes that were agreed upon.

## Removing a Member

On rare occasions, a team member may resist making appropriate changes in behavior or performance expected by the team and may become so disruptive to the team that he/she prevents the team from achieving team goals. When a team can no longer function with the disruptions, the only solution may be to remove the disruptive team member. The following policies govern removing a member from a learning team.

1. An individual student cannot be subjected to discrimination, including being removed from a learning team by other students on the team, because of the student's race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.
2. Removal of team members should be handled confidentially and with the same sensitivity and consideration required in any personnel matter.
3. Before an individual student can be involuntarily removed from a learning team by other students on the team:
  - The learning team must advise the student the reasons for the proposed removal from the learning team and provide the student an opportunity to respond to and address the learning team's concerns.
  - If the student and the other learning team members are unable to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all involved, the learning team must notify the Director of Academic Advising and explain the basis for the proposed removal, including providing the reason(s) for the removal.
  - The student identified to be removed from a learning team shall be notified of the reasons for his or her removal from the team by the Director of Academic Advising and given an opportunity to meet with the Director of Academic Advising to respond to his or her proposed removal from the team.
  - The Director of Academic Advising shall meet with the entire learning team to attempt to resolve the issues identified by the learning team members.

If a student is removed from a learning team, the Director of Academic Advising shall assist the student in identifying other teams that the student may be able to join.

In the event the Director of Academic Advising is unable to identify an alternative learning team for the student, and the student withdraws from the program as a result, the Director of Academic Advising shall summarize, in writing, the reasons provided by the learning team for the student's removal, and the Director of Academic Advising's attempts to resolve the issue and/or identify an alternative learning team. A copy of the summary will be made available to the student upon request.

A student who has been removed from a learning team by other students on the team may appeal the removal through a due process procedure for the program or the University's grievance procedure.



## **Conclusion**

It is the hope of the faculty and staff of Baker University's School of Professional and Graduate Studies that you will find the learning team experience to be one of the most rewarding of your academic career. While it can be challenging during the initial stages, once your learning team develops into a fully functioning team, you will find that the advantages are plentiful. The Learning Team Handbook can serve as a comprehensive resource to assist you on your journey to academic success, if you integrate it into your learning team's practices.



# LEARNING TEAM TOOLS

## Learning Team Meeting Summary

Team Number \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Class Number \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

This report should be prepared for each learning team meeting outside of class. The purpose is to help the learning team and the faculty member to evaluate the team's progress on significant assignments or projects.

1. What was the purpose of this meeting?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Project Planning (identifying tasks, setting deadlines)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Team Organization (assigning tasks & responsibilities)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Team Decision Making on Project  
\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Reports and Feedback on Tasks  
\_\_\_\_\_ Development of Final Report
2. How many members are in your team? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many members attended the team meeting? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Take a minute to think about the level of teamwork and cooperation within the team. On a scale of one to five, where five describes a very high level of teamwork and cooperation and one describes little or no teamwork or cooperation, how would you rate your last meeting? (Circle one number)  
  
1      2      3      4      5
5. How balanced was the involvement by individual members in the team process? Five describes a very balanced involvement and one describes very little balance. (Circle one number)  
  
1      2      3      4      5
- 6a. Did conflicts arise during the meeting? (If no, skip to question 7a.)  
  
Yes    No

6b. If yes, were the conflicts resolved to everyone's satisfaction?

Yes No

6c. If no, why not?

7a. Did the team achieve its goals for this meeting? (If yes, skip to question 8.)

Yes No

7b. If no, why not?

8. What date was set for the next meeting?

9. What is the purpose for the next meeting?

\_\_\_\_\_ Project Planning

\_\_\_\_\_ Team Organization

\_\_\_\_\_ Team Decision-Making on Project

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Reports and Feedback on Tasks

\_\_\_\_\_ Development of Final Report



# LEARNING TEAM EVALUATION FORM

NOTE: This form is to be completed by each team member in confidence. The instructor should also maintain confidentiality.

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

[1] Names	[2] [3] [4] [5] [6] Attended Planning Sessions	Prepared Materials	Demonstrated Voluntary Cooperation	Fulfilled Responsibility in Class	Overall Evaluation
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
Your Name					

0 = Lowest Evaluation 5 = Highest Evaluation

- 1 List the names of each team participant and your name, as indicated. Be sure to evaluate yourself.
- 2 Scale 0 to 5 — To what extent did each member of the team attend the learning team sessions scheduled?
- 3 Scale 0 to 5 — Did each team member prepare materials as assigned?
- 4 Scale 0 to 5 — Did each team member participate in a positive manner with other team members?
- 5 Scale 0 to 5 — Did each team member participate in class with all responsibilities fulfilled?
- 6 Scale 0 to 5 — How would you rate the overall evaluation contribution of each team member?



## **Process Check Rating Procedure**

- Each week take 10 - 20 minutes to review the progress of your learning team in the six areas listed on the Process Check Rating Form.
- Have each member silently rate each area.
- Assign a leader and have each member read out their numbers.
- Do not discuss the scores until all members have read out numbers.
- The leader will make hash marks above each number read on a copy or overhead of the Process Check Rating sheet.
- On a flip chart, or white board, brainstorm on what could have been done to improve the meeting and what can be done to improve the next meeting.
- Include these notes and a copy of the check form with the agenda minutes.



## Process Check Rating Form

For each of the following rating scales, silently rate your team's process as you experienced it during the meeting.

### ON-TRACK

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

No agenda, or did not follow the agenda

Followed the agenda; no digressions

### PARTICIPATION

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

A few key members dominated; some members did not participate

Everyone contributed and was involved in team decisions.

### LISTENING

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

More than one person talked at a time; repetitions, interruptions and side conversations were common

One person talked at a time, clarifying and building on ideas

### SHARED LEADERSHIP

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

No attempts were made to bring the team back on-track and encourage equal participation

Team leader and team members intervened to keep the team on track and actively managed equal participation

### DECISION QUALITY

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Team decisions were inferior to individual assessments

Team expertise and decisions were superior to individual judgments

### USE OF TIME

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Very limited value; time would have been better spent doing something else

Very constructive and satisfactory



## Agenda/Meeting Minutes

Use the following forms to create a meeting record tailored to your learning team. Make copies of the completed form and distribute as minutes to each learning team member. Appoint a scribe at each meeting for taking notes. Use a dark pen so the scribe does not need to redo them.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

### ATTENDANCE:

### AGENDA:

### TIME:

- |          |          |       |
|----------|----------|-------|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | 5. _____ | _____ |

### FUTURE MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### MEETING NOTES:

**ACTION ITEMS:** (Follow-up Items and Who Will Do What?)



## Meeting Review

“+”	“—”
<b>Things that went well this meeting</b>	<b>Things to watch for next meeting</b>



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