



## MANAGING GROUP PROJECTS

### Student Perspective

I am working on a group project with two other students for my dissertation. We had lots of problems at the start, not only because it was a topic we weren't interested in, but because initially there were four people in the group. It used to be very stressful and it was hard to mediate between us all because of this one group member who was always a little bit of a struggle to work with. She was, you know, lagging behind and we were giving her all the ideas. She was taking credit for all the ideas in supervision and our supervisors would go, "Oh, good work, team," and I just felt like, "No, it's not 'team'. She didn't do anything." And so it took a couple of weeks probably for the supervisors to address that properly. When she did drop out of the course, I was very happy.

It's hard working in a group, like definitely sometimes I think it'd just be easier to do it on my own, especially because I feel that two of us put in a lot effort and maybe the other one does sometimes, but not all the time. Having three of us in the group, not every session gives me the opportunity to speak. Like probably about two weeks ago, two of our group members pretty much dominated the whole session with their questions, so it took up the whole hour so I didn't really get a chance. I had about one minute to ask my questions and the supervisor kind of said, "No, I've got to go now. We'll have to pick this up later," kind of thing. So I think sometimes having three people with only one supervisor, three people demanding of one person's time, is hard.







so they're showing us if they're working on it. Eventually my co-supervisor had to read them the riot act. I think it worked, so I hope they buck up a bit more.





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### Coordinator Perspective

Both new and experienced supervisors sometimes experience difficulties in managing group dissertation projects. Some groups are incredibly dysfunctional, and that can be extremely traumatic for a student, especially as these students, many of them, didn't want to do research in the first place. The problem is compounded when groups are assigned to a project that they are not interested in. It's hard for the supervisor because they're starting out from a low -from students going "I didn't want to do this project". Some supervisors are successful in interesting the students in the project, even when the project was not their original choice. They are enthusiastic about the project and they're trying to engage the students in what they do in the project, giving them some initiative.

Problems can also arise if the project is too difficult - if you've got a student who is weak in the study area they can really struggle. So then it's frustrating for the supervisor and completely demoralising for the students. We can end up with some mismatches there and that's where students can get quite distressed.

Most years there will be a group, at least one group, that will come to me and say, Person X is not pulling their weight and it's not fair and we're pulling them along. I think when it's a person who is not pulling their weight, then that is a festering sore unless the rest of the group can band together, but then they're working together and excluding the other person.

Other times it might be a supervisor coming to me about a disruptive student within the group. When supervisors come to me about a student causing problems and distressing the group, we discuss ways of coping, of dealing with the students so that it doesn't affect the other members of the group.

