

Working with others

Aim of the Group Work

You will be working on a technical project in ENGR302. The focus is of the work is on collaboration and learning to work with others on a large project.

We are interested in the technical aspects of the project. You will write about them in reports and present them to us in person. However, you are doing the technical work to experience and learn from working with others. If you look at the marking schemes, you can see that there is no direct assessment of the quality of the end product. This might seem strange at first, but we do it this way because we want the focus of the group to be on collaboration, allowing everyone to contribute, make mistakes with minimal impact on grade, and learn from the mistake. The important thing is to be aware of what you have done. Especially the mistakes you have made, know the impact of the mistakes and learn from them so that you might avoid them in the future.

Having said that, a high-quality project is (most) often the product of well-functioning teamwork. Where all of the above things have happened. This is because it provides the best platform for writing high-quality reports and deep individual reflections.

Historically, the worst-case scenario has been teams in which one or two strong students take over all of the work or where students do not realise their mistakes and do not change their approach but instead try to keep them a secret.

Consequently, the emphasis in the group should be on maximising the group's work and collaborating so that everybody contributes to their full potential. To put emphasis on this, the assessments are based 60% on group assessments and 40% on individual assessments.

Get a good start

It is important to begin your group work by assigning roles. With a relatively large group, you should agree on how you will collaborate (waterfall, SCRUM/XP/DevOps/Agile, etc). What your roles are in the group. How you will communicate, and how you will work together. In ENGR302, we are not prescriptive about how you work together. It is your choice, but the tools and methods you have learned in ENGR301 should guide your choices. If you later find out you organised yourself poorly, this is one of the mistakes you can learn from.

Make sure you set realistic expectations of each other. Plan your weeks around other commitments. Plan when you might be too busy with other courses. Know how to communicate with others if you are sick so that the rest of the team is aware that you won't be able to work with them.

We will require you to work weekly with the tutor, who will be your mentor and immediate "line manager."

Work distribution

Nobody should be expected to work on everything. Organise the group so that everybody has roles and knows what they work on. Make it flexible and manage the risks of illness and workload on other courses. You can organise yourself in whatever way you think will produce the best working group, as long all will contribute fairly.

You do not all need to contribute equally or even directly to the group reports (except for the group presentation, where everyone must participate). It is important that all of you have contributed to the work underlying the reports and everyone agrees on the final product.

For instance, if you decide that one member is a SCRUM master or Project Manager with an overview of the group members' work, it might be sensible for this person to take the lead in report writing by collating and merging documentation from other members for the final report. However, it probably would be unfair to expect this person to also contribute as much in actual coding.

Your organisation should be about fairness and strengthening your team's ability to collaborate.

What if a student freerides or "disappears"

Recall, ENGR302 is about learning to work collaboratively with people. Sometimes that includes difficult situations, such as people freeriding or simply disappearing.

If you feel this is a problem, be proactive. First, talk about it in the group. See if you can resolve the situation within the group, it is a regular part of project management in the team. It might be something valuable to reflect on in your individual reflective reports. I know graduates who have been recruited by companies partly based on their ability to resolve conflicts!

If the problem is serious, and there is no change in behaviour or response to the communication, you should talk to the tutor about it. They can then try and contact the student as their "line managers".

If that does not improve the situation, then inform the course coordinator. We will then step in and see what we can do. If this does not improve anything, then the student will not receive a grade for the coursework (or receive a deduction).

Above all, be proactive. If you come after a report has been submitted and claim some student did not work, then nothing will happen. You accepted them doing it at the time and did not give them a chance to rectify their behaviour.

Submissions

There will not be any extensions of the group submissions. The group must have plans to manage risks around illnesses.

Individual assignments are managed as regular courses, and individuals can apply for extensions using the extension system if they have extenuating circumstances.