Student Perspectives on Class Projects
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Prospective employers demand skilled and knowledgeable workers who are able to work together effectively (Blowers, 2000; Colbeck, Campbell & Bjorklund, 2000; Hansen, 2006; Young & Henquient, 2000). Past research indicates that group projects may be an effective pedagogical tool for educators in higher education (Colbeck, Campbell & Bjorklund, 2000; Hansen, 2006). Young and Henquient (2000) define a group project as “an assignment that requires two or more individuals, interacting and interdependent, to come together to achieve specific objectives” (p. 56). Research in effective use of group projects has concentrated on evaluation (Blowers, 2003; Bormann Young & Henquient, 2000; Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Chen & Lou, 2004) selection and organization of groups (Ashraf, 2004; Young & Henquient, 2000), problems in group projects (Hansen, 2006) and student perceptions (Colbeck & Campbell, 2000; Payne & Monk-Turner, 2006). There has been limited research on the use of group projects in sport students, recreation and sport management. This study seeks to examine student perceptions of class projects, a group assignment that involves the interaction and of an entire class of students for a major event planned and implemented by the students near the end of the semester. In particular, the study examines the impact of underperforming or noncontributing students in a subgroup on student perceptions of the value and effectiveness of a class project as a learning experience.

A questionnaire was developed based on a review of literature dealing with group projects as an educational tool. All of the items have been previously used in previously published research (Buourner, Hughes & Bourner, 2001; Payne & Monk-Turner, 2006). The questionnaire was distributed to students (N=68) who had just completed a semester long class project in which students were divided into committees which planned different parts of a sport or recreational event which the class staged near the end of the semester. Students in all classes were told that peer evaluation would be part of their individual project grade. Students in a sport management classes (N=45) were assigned to subgroups after students applied for committees based on the committee responsibilities and their qualifications for each committee. Students in a recreation class (N=23) were assigned to subgroups based on student preference by assigned student directors.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to analyze whether students reported knowing more about the topic after the class project than before the class project. The results indicated that the mean degree of reported knowledge after the class project (M = 4.29, SD = 0.55) was significantly higher than the mean degree of reported knowledge prior to the class project (M = 2.91, SD = .99, t (67) = 10.43, p = .00). The standardized effect size index, d, was 1.26.

There was no statistically significant difference in students' agreement with the statement that “working together on the project was a good learning experience” between those who reported the presence of an underperforming or noncontributing subgroup member and those who did not report an underperforming or noncontributing group member (t (38) = 1.7, p = 0.09)

We created a difference score to capture the students’ perception of knowledge gained about the topic (knowledge about the topic after the project – knowledge about the topic before the project). We evaluated the impact of method of subgroup formation (student application based on qualifications, student preference) controlling for the presence of an underperforming or noncontributing group member using Analysis of Covariance. There was no significant difference in student’s knowledge difference by method of group formation when controlling for the reported presence of an underperforming or noncontributing group member.

This study supports previous research (Bolton, 1999; Gatfield, 1999; Hansen, 2006) which has shown students have a favorable view of group projects. Elements of the project design and organization may have influenced student perceptions of the class projects. Including peer evaluation as part of multiple measures used to determine individual student grades for a class project is one design element which promotes positive student attitudes toward the project (Chen & Lou, 2004; Lejik & Wyvill, 2001; Payne & Monk-Turner, 2006; Young, & Henquinet, 2000).
Providing class time for group work may also contribute to favorable student views of class projects (Hansen, 2006). It appears that class projects provide sport management students with the same benefits of smaller group projects.