

Assessing the Ineffable—Professionalism, Judgment, and Teamwork

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We know that professionalism, judgment and teamwork are crucial for lawyers' success, but how do we teach and measure those skills? More critically, how do we assess students' behavior in large classes? I have used a variety of methods to assess students' professional engagement, and over the last seven years have employed a protocol for peer evaluation that has worked more effectively than any other method I've used in over fifteen years of teaching.

Why use peer evaluation to assess students' skills?

Even though educational research documents the value of collaborative and cooperative small group active learning exercises, many students hate group work, complaining about “social loafers” who take advantage of others' work, wasting time, and having to work with domineering classmates. When given complex tasks to solve in groups, students have to act professionally and make judgments about how to proceed. To make collaborative work effective, students need to be accountable for their small group contributions in a way that involves them in the process, follows effective assessment methods, and helps them develop as professionals. To develop professionalism, judgment and teamwork, students need to practice those skills and values.

How to use Peer Assessment?

At the beginning of a course, students are placed in permanent, diverse teams of 5-7. As soon as the team is formed, students identify team guidelines — these are the criteria on which they will be assessing each other during and at the end of the course. Almost all teams include treating others with respect, being prepared, communicating outside of class, and participating but not dominating.

Midway through the course, students revisit their team guidelines and provide their teammates with anonymous, formative feedback based on those criteria. Each member of the team provides teammates with quantitative and qualitative feedback. (See sample form p. 5.) After these are submitted, students receive the anonymous comments. Following this exercise, students revisit and refine their team guidelines; often they realize that their criteria need to be more explicit.

At the end of the course, students again review their modified team guidelines and assess their teammates, allocating a fixed number of points per teammate. Students may give everyone on their team the same score, but if they do so, they must justify the result. The score average is used as part of the course grade, ranging from 5-20%.

Protocol for Peer Assessment

1. **At the beginning of the semester, place students in diverse teams of 5-7 students.**
 - Students are divided up in a public, randomized way.
 - Possibility: students line up by categories that relate to qualities that will help their teammates learn. Example – in a first year course, have students line up according to different categories:
 - those who have professional work experience in law or law-related fields – within the category, have them organize themselves by number of months or years of professional experience;
 - those who have work experience outside of law – within the category, have them organize themselves by number of months or years of professional experience;
 - undergraduate/graduate focus on humanities and arts;
 - undergraduate/graduate focus on science, technology, engineering and math;
 - undergraduate/graduate focus on social sciences and business.
 - In an upper level course, you could have students line up by different categories, such as settings in which they might want to practice (government, non-profit, private law firm, business) or attributes (enjoy getting into the finer details of analysis, prefer seeing a big picture). In smaller upper level courses, you can also just ask students to count off from where they are sitting as they tend to sit with their friends and this breaks them up.
 - Have students count off to get sufficient numbers of students in groups.
 - Students sit with their teams each class.
2. Teams identify professional behavior. (**Team Contribution Guidelines**).
3. **Teams work together every week during the semester**, engaging in learning exercises such as collectively solving problems, answering hypotheticals, and taking group quizzes. (To avoid problems with out-of-class conflicts, all teamwork is completed in class; students may, but are not required to meet outside of class.)
4. **After 4-5 weeks, teams review and revise their Team Contribution Guidelines.**
5. After teams review, discuss, and revise (or not) their Team Contribution Guidelines, teams provide their teammates with formative feedback, using the guidelines as their criteria. (**Mid-Term Formative Peer Feedback**).

6. Compile comments for individual students, return to students, and ask them to respond in writing to the feedback. (**Using Peer Feedback to Develop as a Professional**). Collect and give a short response; invite students to meet with you if they have questions.
7. During class give teams with a chance to discuss feedback and suggest changes in team behavior or team guidelines.
8. In the last week of the semester, students assess teammates' professionalism. Compile totals — score average becomes the team contribution score. (**Team Contribution Form**).

Resources: For assessing professional behavior and team-based learning, useful sources are:

- <http://www.teambasedlearning.org/>
- Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching, edited by Larry K. Michaelsen, Arletta B. Knight, and L. Dee Fink (Stylus Publishing, 2004)
- Team-Based Learning: Small-Group Learning's Next Big Step, 2008 New Directions for Teaching & Learning (Winter 2004)
- Sophie M. Sparrow & Margaret Sova McCabe, *Team-Based Learning in Law*, 18 Leg. Writing 53 (2013).
- Sophie M. Sparrow, *Can They Work Well on a Team? Assessing Students' Collaborative Skills*, 38 Wm. Mitchell L. Rev. 1162 (2012).

Team Contribution Guidelines

- Identify 3 or more attributes** that help you and your colleagues learn from each other and work effectively as a team (samples from previous teams are below).
- Be specific about these criteria;** name ones that the members of your team would feel comfortable using for your peer evaluations for this course.
- These are subject to change if the team so decides.** After the team has worked together for a while, you will be asked to review and revise the guidelines. For example, you may have included “Show respect for team members” but will have noticed after a few weeks, that different people define respect differently.

use other side if you need more space

What are the consequences for you and your team members if you or they don’t meet the guidelines?

Previous teams’ criteria included:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to team members-be polite | <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with team about absences and other team-related tasks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be receptive to and respectful of others’ thoughts/input | <input type="checkbox"/> Have a sense of humor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be patient with others’ process and learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Be on time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be prepared – put in a good faith effort | <input type="checkbox"/> Work for the team |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be proactive in addressing problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Be willing to apologize |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> Don’t monopolize or dominate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don’t hide behind the laptop | <input type="checkbox"/> Take turns leading the team |

MID-TERM FORMATIVE PEER FEEDBACK (UNGRADED) *

Complete 1 form for each Teammate – confidentially

Team _____

Colleague you are evaluating: _____

The goal of this feedback is to help your teammates be as effective as possible. Consider the feedback as what you would provide a colleague on the job.

PART ONE: QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT (CHECK *ONLY ONE BOX* FOR EACH ITEM)

		NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
1	Followed Team Guidelines				
2	Is well prepared for team activities and class				
3	Identifies limits of personal knowledge				
4	Is clear when explaining things to others				
5	Gives useful feedback to others				
6	Accepts useful feedback from others				
7	Is able to listen and understand what others are saying				

PART TWO: QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT (*for each item, write **at least one** sentence, but **not more than three** sentences*)

1) What is the single most valuable contribution this person makes to your team? Be specific – use reasoning, for example. “_____ is really helpful to the team and to my learning **because** _____.”

2) What is the single most important thing this person could do to more effectively help your team? Be specific and use reasoning.

*Modified from the Team-Based Learning Collaborative <http://www.teambasedlearning.org/>

Professional Development Assessment: Using Peer Feedback to Develop as a Professional

1. Look at the Mid-term Formative Peer Feedback (Ungraded) form. You will be completing one of these for each of your teammates anonymously; in return, you will receive anonymous feedback from your teammates. **What do you think your teammates will identify as your most valuable contribution to your team?**

2. **What do you think your teammates will identify as the single most important thing you could do to more effectively help your team?**

3. **How can you respond constructively if you receive feedback that is surprising or uncomfortable?**

4. **How can you help your team and teammates if your teammates receive feedback that is surprising or uncomfortable?**

5. **What is your team doing that is working well for you?**

6. **What is your team doing that is not working well for you?**

7. **Other comments about the course (optional)**

TEAM CONTRIBUTION FORM
Hard Copy due _____ at the beginning of class.

If not done effectively and submitted on time, your individual score will be lowered.
Thanks for completing this form privately, accurately, and confidentially

Your Name _____ Team _____

Please assign scores that reflect how the other members of your team contributed to your learning and/or your team's performance. This will be your only opportunity to reward the members of your team who worked hard on your behalf. **(Note: If you perceive that not everyone contributed equally, but you give everyone the same score you will be hurting those who did the most and helping those who did the least.)**

Instructions: In the space below, please rate each of the **other** members of your team. Each team member's peer evaluation score will be the average of the points that team member receives from the other members of the team. To complete the evaluation you must:

- For each member of your team assign an average of **ten** points to the **other** members of your team. If you have a 7 person team **assign a total of 60 points** (if 6 on the team, assign a total of 50, if 5, assign a total of 40)
- You may differentiate some in your ratings; for example, give one score of 11 or higher (maximum 15) and one score of 9 or lower. Explain your reasons below.**
- If you give everyone the same score, justify that choice below.**
- Use whole numbers ONLY.**
- Leave your name and score BLANK.**
- Failure to follow directions or bring a hard copy by the time class starts will earn lower points.

Team 1 Names of teammates (list in alphabetical order by last name as on the sign-in sheet)	Scores (don't rate yourself! – leave your score blank)
TOTAL: Check to see that this equals the number of teammates multiplied by 10 (don't include yourself in the number - see above)	

Reasoning: In the space below, and on the back if you need it, please also briefly describe your reasons for your ratings so that I can understand how you allocated your scores. This information is confidential; I will ask follow up questions if I have them. Providing insufficient reasons for your ratings will result in a lower score.