“Collaboration enhances learning outcomes and reduces the potential for learner isolation that can occur in the online environment. By learning together in a learning community, students have the opportunity to extend and deepen their learning experience, test out new ideas by sharing them with a supportive group, and receive critical and constructive feedback.”

~ Rena Palloff, Ph.D. and Keith Pratt, Ph.D.

**Tips for Planning & Teaching Online Group Work**

- **Ask & Analyze:** Is group work the right approach to help students meet outcomes? Use an ADDIE or Backward Design process to determine whether a group project is the best fit for student success. Survey your students about availability and access concerns before implementing. Not sure where to begin? Submit a request to meet with an Instructional Design Team member – they love to hear from our faculty members to solve instructional challenges!

- **Describe the Purpose & Protocols:** Adult learners want to know why they are doing something, how it helps them meet outcomes and is applicable in the real world, what their role is as an individual and a team member, and how they will be assessed. Be clear about the steps students need to take and expectations. Decide how you will grade and provide feedback to students (individually or as a team – or a mix) and include a rubric that is clear, easy to follow, and aligns with the course outcomes.

- **Scaffold the Experience:** As faculty, we don’t manage our student’s behavior; instead, we provide an engaging learning environment to help them succeed. Design and develop early and mid-point experiences to provide formative, supportive feedback that helps students develop trust and self-confidence before the graded group work activity. Consider a Team Charter activity early in the class.

- **Have a Back-Up Plan That Includes Choice Activities:** Sometimes, the best laid plans... It’s always a good idea to have a few alternative group work activities in your back pocket. Maybe your class needs extra practice opportunities or perhaps they are ready to take group work to the next level. Or maybe your class would thrive if it had freedom to co-construct the group project and assessment criteria. Having back-up strategies in place allows for student-responsive flexibility.

- **Observe & Facilitate:** Get to know your students early in the course and monitor early and mid-point activities. What coaching feedback, resources, and tips do students need to get ready for the graded activity? Be sure to remain engaged, model the process, and serve as a guide.

**Explore Resources**

- Fostering Online Collaboration, 2018 Inside Higher Ed article
- Why Some Students Struggle with Group Work, 2018 Faculty Focus article
- Group Projects in Online Courses, Center for Teaching & Learning 2016 article
- Cooperative Learning & Group Work, GSC Faculty Center web page
- Online Group Work Design: Processes, Complexities, and Intricacies, 2016 Tech Trends article, available for electronic download via the GSC Library & Information Commons
- Real-World Skills that Group Work Develops via Carnegie Mellon University