



Group Oral Exam

A cooperative oral exam can enhance the application and long-term retention of course concepts, model an alternative method of assessment, and deepen student understanding while fostering group skills. (Guest & Murphy, 2000)

Appropriate Student Level: Junior +

Suggested Class Size: Small to Moderate

Ease of Use Rating: Moderate

Activity Description:

The cooperative oral exam described by Guest and Murphy is an assessment format that is applicable in a wide range of disciplines. It was designed to accomplish three goals:

- 1) to enhance the application and long term retention of critical course concepts;
- 2) to model for prospective teachers an alternative method of assessing student learning; and
- 3) to deepen students' understanding of course material while also fostering group skills.

Guest and Murphy used the following method:

A group exam may be used as an alternative to a traditional written exam. Students prepare for and take the exam in the cooperative groups, typically of four people, in which they have worked throughout the course. (See home base groups) Three days prior to the exam, students are given a list of questions from which the exam questions will be selected, and a description of the process for the exam. These 2 1/2 days are built into the course schedule as exam preparation time. Group members work to help each other master course material so that each member of the group may respond to any question asked of him/her on the exam day.

On the third day each group meets with the two instructors for 15 minutes. Individual accountability, identified as a critical element in cooperative group learning, results from the fact that students are called on randomly, and each must be prepared to offer the group's analysis of any of the questions. Giving a single group grade for the exam provides positive interdependence, another essential element. The instructors plan five minutes between groups to discuss the group's performance, determine the group grade, and write comments for the group. The grade and comments are available at the end of the exam day. (Guest & Murphy, 2000)

The method can be varied to meet a course objectives and resources. The group exam can eliminate large numbers of papers to grade, provide interdependence among students and encourage discussion and collaboration within a class.

References:

- Guest, Kristin E, Murphy, Diane S (2000) "In support of memory retention: A cooperative oral final exam" *Education*; 121(2); pp. 350-354
- Kovac, Jeffery (1999) "Student active learning methods in general chemistry" *Journal of Chemical Education* 76(1); pg. 120