

Is Student Groupwork Achieving the Goals We Intend?

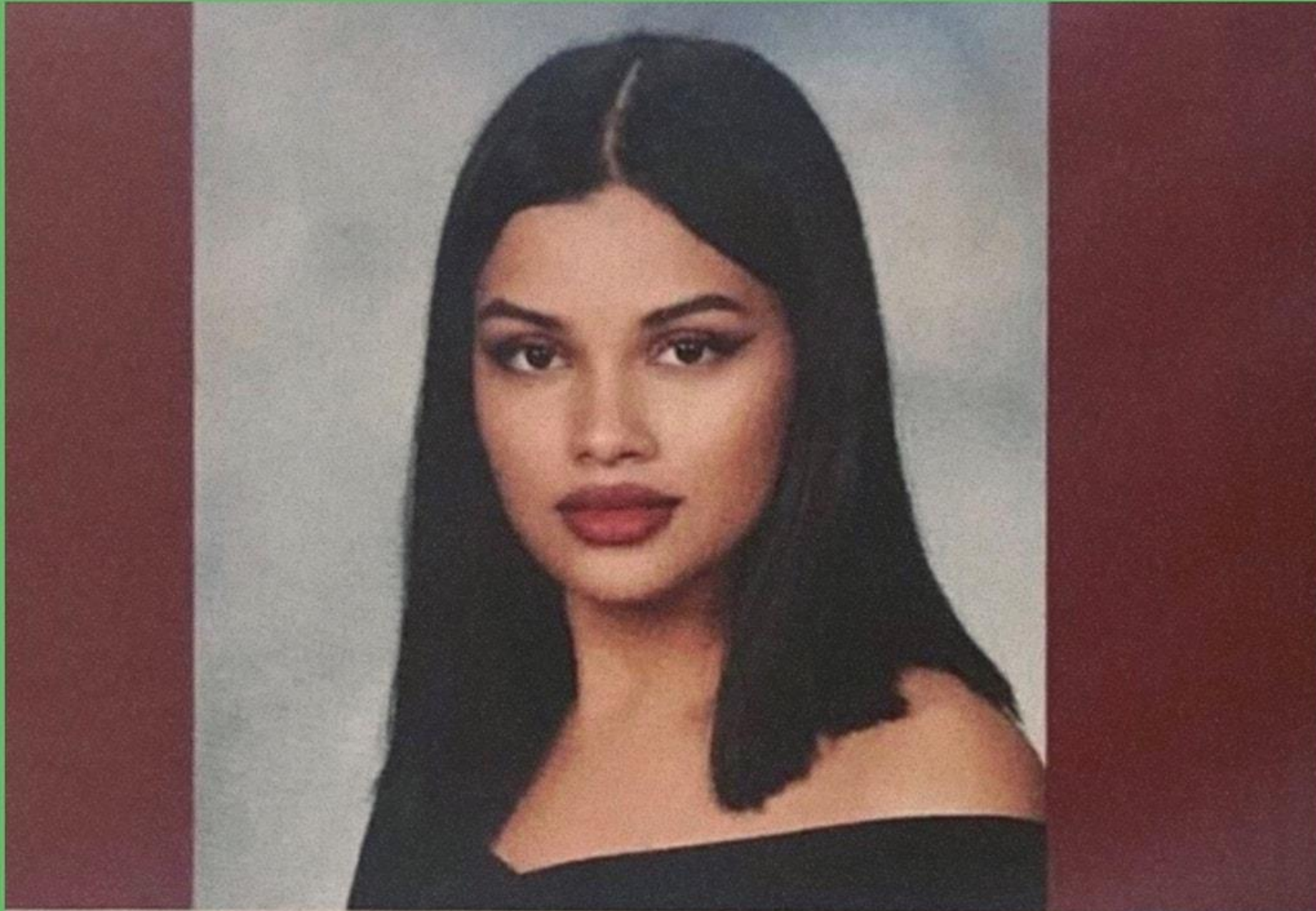
Using Appreciative Inquiry to Enhance Student Groupwork Effectiveness



“All group projects ever taught me was to assume everyone I collaborate with will always be either stupid or shirk their responsibilities to the point they might as well not be there. Nowadays, if I ever see someone I’m grouped with pull a smidgen of weight, I sit there in awe for a bit at how cool it is.”

Waterbuck71, Reddit, 2022





Ashley Narine

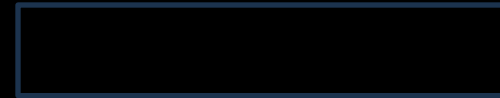
When I die, I want the people I did group projects with to lower me into the ground so they can let me down one last time.

ifunny.com

OUR STUDENTS



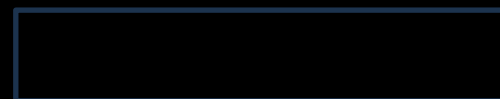
I lost friends from a groupwork project, and I had to see a counselor. There is so much social pressure to do others work and give good grades.



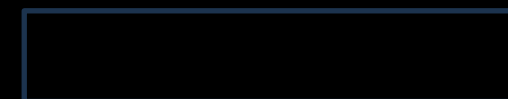
The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. With much group work, the strong students benefit, and the struggling students struggle even more



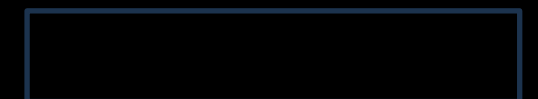
I get stressed with all the groupwork projects and everyone else leaves it to the last



I am anxious with all the group meetings. We spend so much time trying to coordinate meetings that it takes away from our learning.



I get frustrated when I am the only one doing most of the work



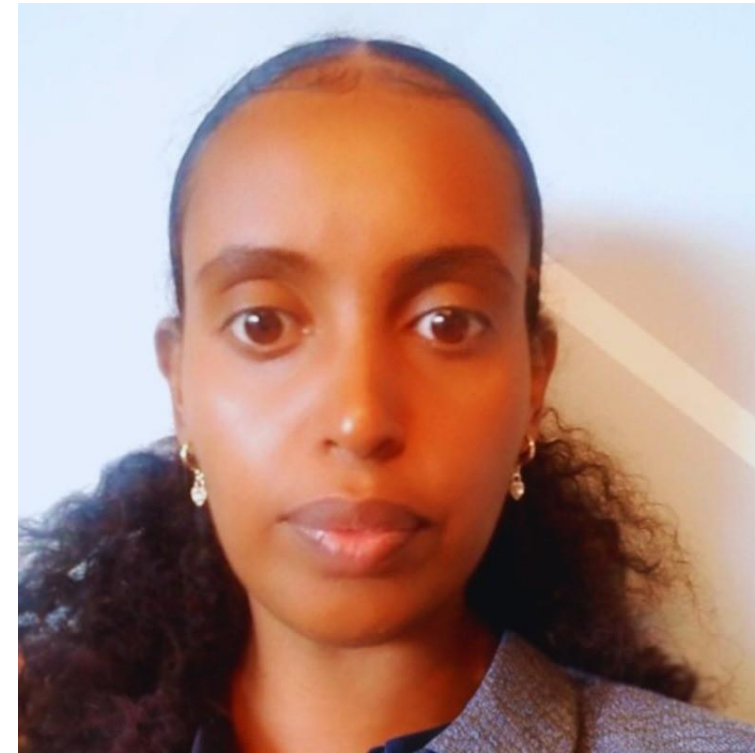
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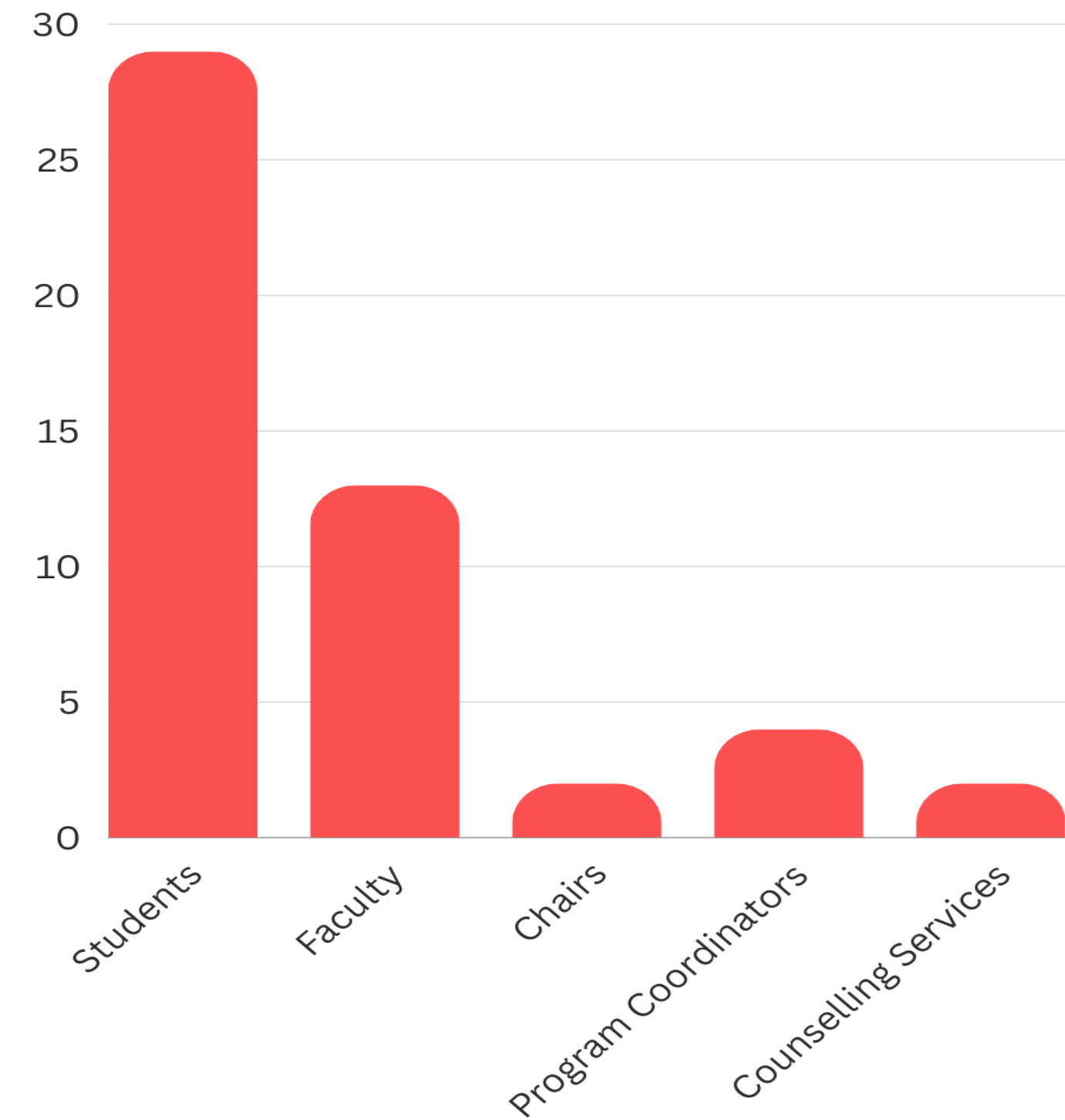
What Did We Do and Why?

1. 12 Focus groups with Faculty, Students, Chairs, Programs Managers, and Counselling and Accessibility
2. To validate and problem-solve around anecdotal evidence.
3. To explore what's working/not working with how we facilitate student group work, as perceived by students and faculty
4. To explore the impact of student group work on neurodiverse students
5. ***To maximize learning and minimize challenges with student group work in a college environment**



Methods

Focus Groups	Number attended
Students	29
Faculty (foc & faculty)	13
Chairs (include Maria)	2
Program Coordinators (incl Maria + randa)	4
Counselling Services	2
TOTAL	50



What We Found: What's Working

Exposure to Diversity

Working in diverse groups helps students learn from different cultures, enriching perspectives and improving intercultural communication and global knowledge

"As an international student, I get to work with people from different cultures - get to understand their dynamics and how they work." (International Student)

Enhanced Communication and Problem-Solving

Group work fosters improved communication and problem-solving skills, particularly for international and lower semester students, by 'forcing' students to interact and collaborate with peers.

"I am discovering new ways of communicating with people that I never thought I would personally achieve." (High Semester Student)

Collaboration and Teamwork

Positive experiences in learning to work effectively as a team, improving collaboration, and building strong working relationships.

"Groupwork has helped me a lot when it comes to collaboration and is exercised a lot whether or not students like it - because in a way you are forced to collaborate regardless of whether you like it or not." (Neurodiverse Student)

Leadership Skills

Students often develop leadership skills through group work by taking initiative and managing group dynamics. This is highlighted by those in higher semesters.

"A great opportunity to develop leadership skills and delegate, especially at those times when no one else steps up." (Neurodiverse Student)

Sharing of Ideas

Students learn to share ideas among one another and learn new ways of thinking about problems and issues.

"Sharing of ideas and sharing of responsibility is working well. When students get together in groups, they can generate more ideas - some of the anxiety and stress can be lessened by being able to rely on others for ideas." (Teaching and Learning)

Transferable Skills

They are learning a set of transferable skills that apply to interdisciplinary teams in the workplace, such as interpersonal skills, time management, and project management." (Faculty).

What We Found: What's Not Working

Ineffective Group Tools

Dissatisfaction with the effectiveness and implementation of group tools is viewed as an additional burden.

"The tools we have are not adequate" (Neurodiverse Group), "an extra task for us to check" (Neurodiverse Group), "I don't have faith in it (peer evaluations)" (Neurodiverse Group), "it doesn't fulfill the purpose that it's supposed to" (Lower Semesters Group)

Scheduling Difficulties

Students trying to get together with teammates pose significant challenges for effective group collaboration. Group availability becomes difficult to coordinate, impacting outcomes.

"Getting everyone together at a specific time/finding a suitable time is difficult. We had to work at midnight because that was the only time everyone was available." (International Group)

Unequal Contribution/Social Loafing

Differing levels of contribution result in frustration and resentment between group members and undermines teamwork.

"It can be exhausting when there is not equal distribution of work, others not completing their part properly - you put your whole heart and soul, and others don't care." (International Student)

Lower Grades Due to Others' Efforts

Groupwork isn't managed well to prevent strong students from being penalized for the work of less strong students.

"Sometimes your grades are tied to other students' inefficiencies, and it is really sad" (International Group) "I really really hate that." (Neurodiverse Group)

Groupwork Frequency

Frequency of groupwork should align with the course, enhance learning, maintain balance and not overwhelm students.

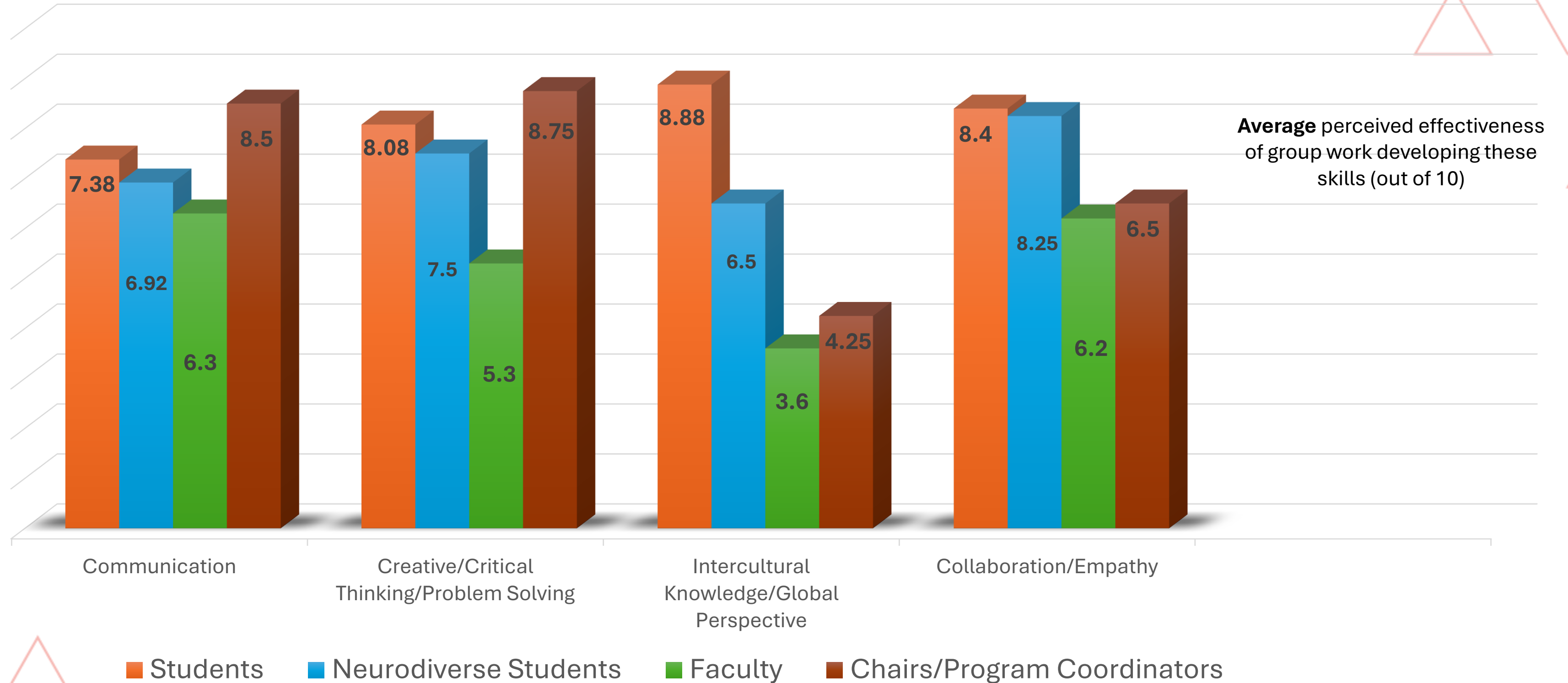
"It's so much. It's too much. I don't think Faculty realize how many groupwork projects happen across semesters. It's impossible to coordinate." (High Semester Student)

Assignment Instructions Unclear

Students feel there is more opportunity for Faculty to be clearer with instructions, break down assignments into more divisible parts as opposed to writing an individual-type of assignment and just saying its groupwork.

"The instructions were unclear and frustrating - we need more clarity on assignments and to have guidance in how to structure the work"

Perceived Effectiveness of Student Group Work in Developing Seneca's Employability Skills and Human Skills





What Changes Can I Make in My Classroom Today?

1. **Less is more.** Be strategic about when group work is required versus the default. Is group work needed to meet the learning outcomes if they have other group projects across their courses?
2. **Keep groups small.** Do smaller paired or individual assignments. This does not require more grading, and in pairs or groups of 3, it maximizes the benefits while reducing challenges.
3. **Support them along the way.** Have milestones due dates and meet with the groups in class at least once
4. **Hybrid of forming own groups and Faculty forming**
5. **Be strategic about the weighting of groupwork.**
6. **Training on group work in classes where there's group work (15 minutes helps)**
7. **Formative assessments critical:** have small in-class group assignments in the same groups as the final project to practice and monitor. Only doing group in-class cases can be extremely effective, especially for lower semesters.
8. **Clarify roles and accountability.** Have students take ownership over pieces and label it on the assignment and have the flexibility to grade individual parts
9. **Hands-on support more valuable than tools.** Students don't take peer evaluations and contracts seriously. Supporting students with a few check-ins is more effective in reducing social loafing and keeping things on track.



Seneca
Polytechnic

Faculty Toolkit for Student Group Work

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR
ENHANCING GROUP WORK
EFFECTIVENESS



Thank You