

STUDY GROUPS

We view the process of study group formation as a prototypical instance of the organization and development of myriad human social systems. From beginning to end, the system development process goes through a lifecycle whose trajectory comprises a characteristic sequence of more or less fixed and invariant stages or phases (e.g. birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, old age, death or entering, forming, norming, storming, performing, exiting). By an hypothesis that is readily confirmed, each stage is marked by the need to resolve certain crises (e.g. Approach/Avoidance Conflict, Basic Trust/Basic Mistrust, Power and Control, Autonomy/Interdependence; competition/collaboration; Generativity or Stagnation).

You should take some time at the outset considering the suitability of the "social architecture" of your meeting place, getting comfortable in it, and becoming suitably acquainted with each other. Who are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you heading? Why are you taking this class? Try to go beyond your past or present MIT courses of study, MIT living groups, MIT classes, etc. What else do you have to say to each other? What is special or unusual about you?

9.68 is what you all have in common here, and all of you have just completed the benchmark questionnaire. The instructors claim to be trying to proceed in accordance with the demand characteristics of a somewhat unorthodox pedagogical approach (aka "collaborative learning"). What do you think about that? Wouldn't this be a good time to talk together with your groupmates and classmates in terms immediately relevant to expectations for better or worse, regarding what you are all getting yourselves in for?

What are your default assumptions – your hopes and fears (if any) -- regarding the likely developmental of the 9.68 collaborative learning system and your own involvement in it?

How might what there is to be learned through participation in this class fit into or interfere with your plans for personal and social (e.g. scientific, professional) development?

As you introduce yourselves, think about the terms in which you and your peers "normally" define yourselves in MIT undergraduate academic contexts such as this one. Try to identify some of the explicit and implicit loyalties (both "visible" and "invisible") in the study group and the class as a whole. Compare/contrast your "first impressions of this class". How are these commonplace efforts at "impression management" influencing your interactions with each other? What is your view of the "other study groups?" Why is the class being defined as "collaborative" and being thus organized

into "study groups?" Are these arrangements cooperative or competitive? Are there any "serious" students in this subgroup? What do we mean by "serious" in this context? At every meeting, share (insofar as you honestly can) your "feelings about the class thus far". Identify class and study group organizational issues that need to be discussed. Prepare to listen to each other.

Of course, no two human systems (no two people, families, groups, 9.68 classes, etc. etc.) become organized and develop in exactly the same way.

Not every classroom learning system is based on the collaborative model that informs and gives shape to itself in recurrently transgenerational fashion. Such a system gives to each participating student (and hence all the study groups, and the class as a whole) both the power and the responsibility of determining its own pedagogical quality. Each constituent subsystem seriously and sincerely commits itself to putting into the 9.68 learning process the necessary and sufficient kind and quantity of the time and effort

What quality and amount of time/effort are you ready, willing and able to put in?
What final grade are you hoping and expecting to get out of it?

Other classes are based on adherence to other values. These are the values that we have inherited from past generations of 9.68 classes and which we will continue to use in guiding our work together this term. Don't look to us for "right answers." Pertinently, you should expect to encounter some of what social psychologists call "cognitive dissonance" as you become involved in the process of organizing your own efforts to make explicit your own images of "what is best?"

The process of formative evaluation that we must rely on requires all of us to define and monitor the amount of time, and the quality of the effort per week that we put in to making the collaborative learning system work as it is intended to.

The workload is not intended to be light weight. The syllabus presumes a readiness, willingness and ability for everyone to devote neither more nor less than the officially stipulated modicum of time and effort to the task of doing-to-completion the assigned work. In order to be successful in this class you must: a) do the assigned readings (and additional reading as assigned or appropriate), and b) regularly make quality time available alone and in study group meetings for serious and sustained reflection/meditation on the subject material and its theoretical and practical implications. Serious students will devote substantial time and effort to achieve high quality in their writing of the assigned "reaction papers."

In addition, you are expected to begin at once keeping your own 9.68/05 Journal. It is up to you to determine what to put into it, but it is also incumbent upon you to make clear to each other and to us the form that your Journal will take and the manner in which you propose to keep track of and evaluate the quality of your 9.68 experience, including (but not necessarily limiting yourself to) and account of the quality and amount of the time and the effort that you will actually be putting into 9.68.

The quality of class and study group discussions will be largely determined by the attitudes and behavior of each and all of the participants. All serious students will understand the importance of carrying their fair share of the task of realizing these desiderata. For our parts, we (the instructors) will constantly be goading you to improve the overall academic quality of your participation, and expect you to be encouraging yourselves and each other to be "serious students" of the subject before us.

Doing weekly assignments in a timely and conscientious fashion means doing them before the applicable study group and/or class meetings. Your study group should discuss and agree on a schedule that ensures timely completion of required tasks.