

# WORKING THROUGH TEAM CHALLENGES

The purpose of this document is to outline a **clear process** to support student teams to resolve challenges. Challenges or conflict within teams requires teams to apply their learning, and make every reasonable effort to resolve team issues within the team.

However; at all stages as an individual or as a team, if there are factors leading to inefficiency in teamwork you may seek support from the Team Coach, your Instructor(s) and the Program Office.

Examples of performance challenges may include:

- *Writing challenges that the team is not able to support on an ongoing basis*
- *Repeated mistakes or lapses in understanding course outlines and Instructor guidelines/expectations*
- *Unclear guidelines for team roles and responsibilities*
- *Attendance/participation in class or out*
- *Missed external deadlines*
- *Quality of academic work*

Examples of behavioural issues may include:

- *Intra-group communication*
- *Late or lack of response to team communication*
- *Missed internal deadlines*
- *Breakdowns in trust*
- *Interpersonal conflict*
- *Participation*
- *Lack of accountability*
- *Breach of confidentiality*

For other factors that can contribute to team dynamics please refer to the Learning in Teams document provided at the beginning of your program.

## Issues that require immediate attention of the Instructor and Program Office

- Evidence of plagiarism or cheating: [Academic Integrity](#)
- Evidence of harassment or discriminatory language or behaviour: See here for the link to [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) and a link to the [Student conduct process](#)
- Personal or confidential issues that may impact a learner's ability to participate effectively in the program (e.g., physical or mental illness, change in financial status, family emergencies, work circumstances, etc.). Link here for [information about RRU counselling services](#) and Link here for [information about RRU Accessibility services](#)

## Step 1: WORK TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE WITHIN THE TEAM

Students are encouraged to follow **the steps below** to promptly address and proactively resolve team issues. Your Team Coach is available to assist with this process:

- Identify and **document** the specific issue and the impact on the team
- Create time and space to address the issue directly and respectfully;
- As a team, brainstorm and **document strategies** for addressing the concern, applying team development, theory, leadership, and conflict resolution skills;
- Review your Team Agreement to see if anything needs to be **added, altered or revisited**;
- Develop an agreed upon description and timeline of what needs to happen to satisfy the team's expectations;
- Contact your Instructor for clarification on academic and performance concerns;
- **Document this process and share with all members of your team.**

## Step 2: ONGOING, UNRESOLVED, URGENT AND ESCALATING CONCERNS: Request support from the Team Coach

If the team has not been able to resolve the issue, or the issue is more **urgent** in nature, students are encouraged to contact the Instructor, Program Office, and the Team Coach and provide documentation of the concern. There may be times when the Team Coach has identified a significant issue or is asked by the student team, Instructor(s), or the Program Office to intervene. When notified of a concern, the Team Coach will work to identify and resolve issues affecting the team's ability to function.

- a) The Team Coach will follow-up with next steps that may include:
  - Coaching individuals who are encountering difficulties;
  - Engaging in a phone call, conference call, Skype, Google hangout call, Wechat video call, Collaborate session, individual and / or team to facilitate discussions about specific concerns;
  - Meeting with the full team for a facilitated discussion;
  - Guidance and recommendations to support proper process for resolution.
- b) If the issue remains unresolved after working with the Team Coach, the Team Coach in collaboration with the Instructor and/or Program Head, may follow any or all of the below steps:
  - Refer team members to additional RRU support services as required;
  - Report concerns to the Program Office;
  - Contact Instructors to discuss the situation;
    - If the issue continues to remain unresolved, the course Instructor may determine that member(s) of the team receive a different grade on team assignment(s).
  - Meet with the full team for a facilitated team discussion;
  - Guide teams to develop a clear **Note of Concern (see process below)**;
  - Guide the development of a **Letter of Expectation (see process below)** in collaboration with the Program Head;
  - The Program Head may recommend to the Dean to consider a student(s)' dismissal

from the program as per the policy governing [Required to Withdraw](#)

The Team Coach works to restore teams so members can work together. In the event this restorative work is unsuccessful, then the Team Coach will support and guide your team through the processes described below. The preference is to restore teams to function rather than turning to punitive measures. In all cases, teams should maintain a record of their work, including agreements, planning, communication, and meetings. These records are the documentary evidence for resolving disagreements and conflicts. Team Coaches make every effort to maintain transparency and openly discuss this process with all members of the team.

**Ongoing and Escalating Issues:**

If the issue continues to remain unresolved following the intervention of the Team Coach, the course Instructor may determine that member(s) of the team receive a different grade on team assignment(s).

If the issue persists, the Program Head may recommend to the Dean to consider a student(s)' dismissal from the program as per the policy governing [Required to Withdraw](#).

### Step 3: NOTE OF CONCERN

The following describes the process for teams to use if the restorative process above has been unsuccessful. For an action related to this process to take place more than 50% of the members of the team must support the action. If there is no consensus within the team regarding the drafting of the **Note of Concern**, consult with your Team Coach and she/he will facilitate a discussion on your next steps as a team.

- 1) If a member(s) of a team is not meeting performance and or behavioural expectations, the team can send a **Note of Concern** via their university email to all members of the team:
  - a) The specific problem (e.g. meetings missed or work not done/done late – describe the facts).
  - b) Action steps that have occurred to solve the concern up to this point.
  - c) A description of the expectations the learner must meet to satisfy the team. Refer to the list above.
  - d) A timeline for correcting the problem.
- 2) The **Note of Concern** must be cc'd to your Team Coach and the Program Office.
- 3) Once a **Note of Concern** is sent, the Team Coach will discuss the issue with both the recipient of the **Note of Concern** and the team members. Depending on the nature of the concern, the Coach may ask to meet with the team together or individually. The Team Coach will ensure that conflict resolution and communication is being used appropriately by the team, will work to support successful resolution, and ensure accountability to program requirements. **NOTE:** This could be a meeting that the Program Head and /or Instructor(s) participate in depending on the concern.
- 4) If a recipient of a **Note of Concern** does not correct the problem within the agreed upon time frame (and documentation has been provided), the Program Head and Instructor can determine whether the learner will receive a **differential grade** for the assignment. The Team Coach may be asked to support this process by providing supporting documentation and facilitating communications between the team, Instructor and/or Program Head. Only Instructors have the authority to grade assignments differentially and determine the process to do so.
  - a) Member(s) who receives a differential grade must write a **letter of commitment** to the team and cc'd to the Team Coach and Program Head, outlining how they will address the issue(s) in subsequent assignments (if this is NOT the last assignment for this team) and the commitments they will meet. This letter can be an action step that is the result of a facilitated team discussion by the Team Coach regarding strategies moving forward.

## Resolving Team Challenges - RRU

- b) If at any time during the remaining time that the team is together, the learner fails to meet the commitments outlined in the *letter of commitment* and/or as outlined in the Team Agreement, additional differential grades may be assigned for the ongoing assignments. Furthermore, the Program Head may issue a **Letter of Expectation** (see process below) to the team member(s) which may ultimately lead to the member being [Required to Withdraw](#) from the course.
  - c) If the awarding of a differential grade takes place at the end of a team's term, the requirement to meet performance and behavioral expectations carries over to the new team. Failure to meet those documented expectations can result in further differential grades and the learner may be [Required to Withdraw](#) (see process below) from the course or from the program.
- 5) In exceptional circumstances a "Note of Concern" may not be the appropriate next step and there may be a need to go directly to the Letter of Expectation process. That decision will be determined by the Team Coach, Instructor, and the Program Head.

### If in Doubt

Contact the Team Coach at any time.

### Step 4: FORMAL LETTER OF EXPECTATION

In the event the team issue(s) are not resolved through the above guidelines, then an Instructor and/or a Team Coach can recommend that the Program Head consider a formal **Letter of Expectation** be delivered to the student(s) in question.

1. The **Letter of Expectation** is issued by the Program Head.
2. It summarizes the main issues/behaviours, lays out the behavioural / performance expectations moving forward, and sets a timeline for meeting those expectations.
3. The Team Coach, Instructors, Program Office, and team may be part of the process.
4. Failure to comply with the **Letter of Expectation** can result in a failing grade in the assignment and /or course as determined by the Instructor and Program Head.
5. Program Heads may request to the Dean that the student(s) be [Required to Withdraw](#) from the course and/or program, as outlined under RRU's Academic Regulations.

#### Timelines, Communication, and Privacy

Staff, faculty, and coaches endeavor to resolve team issues in a timely manner. Nevertheless, all team concerns take time to communicate, document, and resolve. Out of respect for everyone's privacy and dignity, not every action or step in this process will be communicated back to the team. RRU takes team issues very seriously and works hard to resolve them. Team Coaches will stay in touch and let you know we are working in the background. Depending on the specifics of the situation working through team challenges can take several weeks or more to work through.

Contact:

[teamcoaching@royalroads.ca](mailto:teamcoaching@royalroads.ca)