**This case study is to support the Online Dispute Resolution PowerPoint delivery.**

The case is based on an actual situation and modified to enhance the learning experience of working through an online dispute. There is no right or wrong answer (or is there)?

Each person involved will have a different perspective on the situation, and as the Instructor, you will determine the best course of action based on your views and experiences. The exercise is to have you think through a process in dealing with disputes:

* What is the dispute about, and who is involved?
* Is this something that can be worked out by the students involved in the dispute – use indirect coaching of students?
* Is the issue important enough to actively pursue – direct involvement by the Instructor or other college resources?
* How will or what will benefit the student (student-centered) direct or indirect involvement?
* Is there are risk of physical, mental or emotional abuse (bullying)?
* Do I have all the information I need about the situation, what are the resources available to me, and college policies in place?

Adapted from Working together: a guide to positive problem solving for schools, families, and communities (2014)

You might look at the instructions and have questions immediately about missing information, and this is okay as we live in an imperfect data-driven world. Sometimes this requires us to make assumptions to help us make sense of the world around us. Work with the information provided; you can make assumptions as you need – just keep track of the assumptions as you may want to test your assumptions later.

This exercise is low-risk practice, and you can benefit from each other's experience both professionally but also from how people experienced this exercise from the Instructor and Student point of view.

There are five (5) roles; one (1) Instructor and (4) Students. The background for each role is included below. Please do not share the Instructor role with the Students and vice versa.

Citizenship and Youth, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (2004). *Working together: a guide to positive problem solving for schools, families and communities*. Manitoba: Manitoba Crown Press.

**The Situation** (for the Instructor only)

You are an Instructor in an online Business course that requires students to work in a group of four (4) students to complete a group project deliverable. The group work is planned in the course to be completed over the last half of the semester (7 weeks), culminating with a final written submission and a group presentation. Each week the group is to upload a specific piece of the final submission for review and comment by you. This project represents 40% of the students' final grade. The grading is one grade for the team. However, you have reserved the right to adjust individual grades.



Your first sign of a potential issue is when the group fails to submit a weekly plan element for your review. You reach out to the group through course e-mail to ask if there is an issue.

You hear back from two (2) of the students in response to your inquiry. One student has attached a copy of an exchange between the group that includes the use of profanities. Another student sent an e-mail saying they did not submit anything because the other group members did not do their work.

The tone of the message(s) you saw concerns you and you want to get to the bottom of this!

Figure 1 Image of a text message exchange in which negative language is used.

No problem for you as the Instructor as you have seen and heard it all before! You decide that your first course of action is to set up a group meeting to determine what is going. You sent an e-mail to the group indicating that they missed a submission and that you are aware of some profanities being exchanged online in group chats. An online ZOOM meeting is set, and you must now prepare for this meeting.

You will present your findings and plan to get this group back on track!

**Student 1 Background Information (Male/Female)**

You have been busy at work and have not been participating in the chat discussion or put much effort into doing the work required. You are not sure what is happening. You thought things were going well, weekly submissions were being made, and if you continue to join in some group meetings (when you have time), you should be able to pass this course. When you saw the Instructor's e-mail, you are worried about not passing. You cannot afford to fail and pay to retake this course! When you are in the ZOOM meetings or breakout rooms (when you have time to show up) with the Instructor and other students, you never say much other than everything is okay.

You saw the e-mail from the Instructor, and you guess you will make time to attend the meeting to see what the Instructor has to say.

You can select a gender-specific name to share with the group (Male or Female)

**Student 2 Background Information (Male)**

You have been friends with Student 1 (male/female) but have never met the other Students before. Things were going okay, but then Student 3 (female) started to get too bossy for you, always telling you what to do and when. One day you had enough and told the "bitch" that you had enough, and you were going to ignore her. On top of being bossy, you are all from India, and she a kept bugging you to speak English as she did not understand what I was saying. You don't get it if you are all from India, so you told her to go home if she did not like the way you spoke. You also saw her when you were out one day and told her off. You cannot afford to fail and pay to retake this course! When you are in the ZOOM meetings or breakout rooms with the Instructor and other students, you never say much other than everything is okay.

You saw the e-mail from the Instructor, you guess you will make time to attend the meeting to see what the Instructor has to say.

You can select a gender-specific name to share with the group (Male)

**Student 3 Background Information (Female)**

You did not know anybody in the group when you started the project. This is your first time outside of your province in India and outside of India at all. A couple of the group members (Student 1 & 3) seemed to be okay. Student 1 never seems to participate much, but Student 4 and you seem to be on the same page as far as getting the work done. When you asked the other team members about submitting their parts of the project for the weekly requirements, you would get no response from Students 1 & 2. Student 4 always did his/her part. In a couple of group meetings, the others were speaking in an Indian dialect that you did not speak or understand. You spoke a different dialect even though we are all from India. You told them you did not understand what they were saying and asked if they could speak English to help you out. Student 2 started yelling at you and told you to go home! Then you saw the chat where he calls you a "bitch." Usually, you can stick up for yourself, but you feel threatened by Student 2 in the group chats. Now the group has stopped talking, and we still have a lot of work to do to complete the course. You do not want to fail this course because of the other students; you are doing your part and do not think it would be fair. And on top of all of this, you ran into Student 2 one day, and he started yelling at you in public again. Now you do not feel safe around him at all!

You were glad the Instructor sent the meeting request as you do not know what to do, and you hope the Instructor can sort this out for you as you do not want to fail the course. You sent the Instructor a copy of the chat. When you are in the ZOOM meetings or breakout rooms with the Instructor and other students, you never say much other than everything is okay as you do not want to start any fights.

You can select a gender-specific name to share with the group (Female)

**Student 4 Background Information (Male/Female)**

You have been following what is happening in the group and trying to stay out of the line of fire from Student 2. My job was to put together and upload the submissions to eConestoga. The last week everyone said they would have their part done and sent to you, but no one did. I did not have anything to upload. I am afraid to say anything now after seeing the chat where Student 2 called Student 3 a "bitch." While I feel sorry for Student 3, as we were getting along okay, I do not want to get involved in the fight with the other team members. I just want to do my part and pass the course. When you saw the Instructor's e-mail, you are worried about not passing. You cannot afford to fail and pay to retake this course! When you are in the ZOOM meetings or breakout rooms with the Instructor and other students, you never say much other than everything is okay.

You were glad the Instructor sent the meeting request as you do not know what to do, and you hope the Instructor can sort this out for you as you do not want to fail the course. You sent the Instructor an e-mail saying that you were doing your part of the work and explaining you could not submit anything as the other team members did not send you anything.

You can select a gender-specific name to share with the group (Male or Female)

**Key Points for Consideration & Discussion (to be shared after the simulation is complete):**

**Contributions:**

* Dealing with unequal contributions and the idea of "free riders" in group work;
* Quality of the contributions:
  + Different perspectives on what "quality" work looks like;
* Group leadership – shared; centralized:
  + Are there defined roles within the team for clarity of responsibilities;
  + Are there defined elements/pieces of work assigned?

**Coordination:**

* Tools for coordination online – what works best?
* Timing of coordination – personal, school and work schedules:
  + Individual preferences for when people work best – morning, afternoon, evening;
  + Different perspectives on what "quality" work looks like;
  + Clarity on due dates and deliverables.
* Continuity of communication – planning for regular touch base times.

**Communication**

* Breakdown in communication – the message of the sender versus the decoding of the receiver;
* Language barriers – dialectic differences; mastery of English language; same words/different meanings;
* Tone – how do you interpret tone in online communications when you cannot hear a person speak?
* Professionalism – Respect
  + Use of profanities
  + A reminder that once you put in online, it can take on a life of its own!

**Other Considerations – Underlying Differences**

* Cultural differences and variances – even when coming from the same country;
* Gender role – underlying tone of male/female roles;
* Bullying – during college work and outside of college work;

**Questions for the Instructor to consider:**

* How involved do I need to get – low intervention to high-level management?
* Where does my role start and stop?
* Do I need to inform people; do I need to report this or have other third-party resources involved, or can I manage within the course?
  + use of profanities; bullying online; face to face event on the street?
* Who would I involve, The Chair; Program Coordinator?
* Who would I report the incidents to; Security, others?
* Should I refer the offending student to Student Rights & Responsibilities, others?

Recommended reference: Conestoga College (2020). Online Dispute Resolution Case Study. Prepared by Michael Quartermain. [CC-BY-NC-SA​](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)