

## Create an Online Buddy System to Encourage Student-to-Student Support

Requiring students to collaborate or team up with other students can create a support system that is helpful to all students and can be critical for students who need additional support, particularly in an online environment (Roper, 2007). One way to create a support system is to set up a buddy system for the first few weeks of a course (Cost, 2012). Buddy systems can continue throughout the course; however, working in different teams or groups can also provide the support needed. Below is a suggested process for setting up a buddy system.

**Step 1: Create the buddy teams.** Two strategies for creating buddy teams are outlined below. Three is an effective number for buddy teams, because it is small enough to organize communications easily, while at the same time it provides flexibility in case one team member drops the class, or other issues arise and new groups need to be formed.

**Random groups.** You can create random groups of students by organizing students alphabetically or counting off by three down the roster.

**Strategic groups.** You can create strategic groups based on similarities or differences that might be relevant to the course or for convenience. For example, it might be helpful to group students who have similar schedules or majors. If there is enough variance, you can group students who have more online learning experience with those who have less. You may also want to form groups based on demographic differences. You can gather information at the beginning of the course by asking students to fill in a survey that includes their major, career interests and experience, communication preferences, experience with online learning, digital skills, demographics, and scheduling availability. If you gather this information using SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics, you can download it into a spreadsheet to make it easy to sort and utilize.

**Step 2: Post the buddy system process.** Create a document that lists the groups of students who will be buddies for the duration of the course. Post the listing on the announcements page, or send an email with the following instructions.

*You have been assigned to a buddy group for the duration of the course. This means that you now have a small group of peers to reach out to if you are uncertain about something, you need some help, you are struggling, or you need some words of encouragement. Your job is to help each other succeed in this course. Please establish your support system by midnight on Tuesday by doing the following.*

1. You will need to contact each other by the method of your choosing and set up a time to meet one another either virtually or in-person.
2. At that meeting, you will need to figure out the best times and methods to hold weekly check-ins with each other for the first four weeks. You may want to continue meeting after the initial four weeks; that will be for your group to decide. If the

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group agrees to continue meeting, you are expected to be available for each other for the remainder of the course.

3. The group needs to decide the best way to communicate (e.g., chat, phone, text) outside of the weekly check-ins in the event that one of you needs help or has a question.
4. Elect one person in your group to send an email to me with your buddy system process by Wednesday at midnight. Please notify me if any issues arise with your buddy (e.g., your schedules do not align, your buddy is unresponsive, etc.). I will try to resolve the issue or assign you to a new buddy team.

Note: If a question arises during this process that you are not able to answer, please post it to the Open Discussions and Questions Forum (found on the course entry page) since other students likely have a similar question. I will respond to your question, and other students can benefit from the response.