Collaborative Learning in the Classroom

Implementing collaborative learning can be challenging for many instructors, but there are several helpful strategies to consider before, during, and after the class to ease the process. Through these simple steps, instructors can ensure that students remain engaged, there is an exchange of knowledge, and that there is joint collaboration amongst students to attain a common goal (e.g. group projects, capstones, assignments, etc.).

- **Before**: Planning is an essential facet of collaborative learning. Consider some of the collaborative learning techniques/approaches you would like to use early on when developing your syllabus. For example, if you are interested in helping students become "experts" in a certain sub-topic, you could try the jigsaw method, where students form small groups to work on different aspects of a specific problem and then share their findings in a logical sequence.

- **During**: Be sure to provide students with specific ground rules about what your expectations are, when assigned to work together. Inform them that they are responsible for their own work and contributions. You could consider using evaluative tools such as peer-evaluations or self-assessment forms to maintain accountability.

- **After**: Acknowledge students for their work and efforts. Do not single out or punish students with more group activities, but rather provide concrete and specific feedback to help them improve and remain motivated when working together.

Resources

Dooly, M. (2008). Constructing knowledge together. Telecollaborative Language Learning. A guidebook to moderating intercultural collaboration online, 21-45.
http://www.peterlang.com/PDF/Buecher/Intro/11523_Intro.pdf

For more ideas on collaborative learning approaches:
http://www.cusd.claremont.edu/edu/el/pdfs/Cooperative_learning_strategies.pdf

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.