

Due: Tuesday, April 9th

PORTFOLIO 6: GROUP DYNAMICS

8.1 In the Student Homeless Alliance, we have a facilitator for each meeting. When I first joined SHA, our president, Mayra Bernabe, would facilitate most of the meetings. Since many of us were new to the group, and to organizing in general, we relied on Mayra's experience to guide us. Having the same person facilitate the meetings, in the beginning, went well since the consistency helped everyone learn how to be an effective facilitator. As everyone has gained experience and confidence, we have begun to rotate facilitators for our meetings. A few days prior to the meeting, we will confirm as a group who is going to be facilitating. Since there are so many of us, we are still going through the group to make sure everyone who is an active member has a chance to facilitate. Typically someone will step up and volunteer to facilitate, otherwise, we think about who has not facilitated yet and ask them if they would like to. The facilitator makes the agenda, but usually, a few of us help the facilitator make the agenda as well. This way, members who will be attending the meeting have a say in what will be discussed and they can also prepare better for the meeting knowing what will be discussed. In this way, an agenda has been very helpful. It is also helpful in that it provides structure for our meetings and keeps us on track. Once we begin the meeting, the facilitator will do a brief overview of the agenda, and anyone who did not get a chance to give their input prior to the meeting can add items to the agenda. In *CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action*, it is suggested that the facilitator should ensure that there is a full discussion of each item on the agenda by all group members and should also ensure that the same one or two people aren't doing all the talking (2018:143). Especially as we've gained new members – people who may not be comfortable taking part in the discussion just yet – we have had to be especially cognizant of that as facilitators. Often times, more experienced group members tend to do a lot of the talking and with so many of us, it's easy to let peoples' voices fall through the cracks. For this reason, we pay extra attention to newer and quieter members and subtly encourage them to take part in the discussion. This suggestion from the book has helped improve our group dynamics as it has made our meetings more inclusive.

The group interactions in the Student Homeless Alliance have been highly positive. Many of us now consider each other to be some of our closest friends on campus, almost like a second family, so I believe that is what makes us work so well together. We not only share common values and beliefs, but we also share the same expectations for how our group should operate together. We are all

very respectful of one another, and we encourage and support one another in how we contribute to the group.

8.2 In *CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action*, Dr. Myers-Lipton suggests that the facilitator has several important roles, including to (1) make the meeting's agenda, (2) keep the meeting moving, (3) promote positive group interactions, (4) help members become active listeners, and (5) help the group make decisions (2018:42-48). At the beginning of the semester, Mayra as the main facilitator made the agendas. We did not create the agenda as a group, but we were able to add to the agenda at the beginning of the meetings. As we have progressed, we now all take part in making the agenda. In the book, Dr. Myers-Lipton suggests that the agenda should be sent to the group at least 24 hours before the meeting (2018:143). This is something that we haven't quite gotten right yet. Since we are constantly together throughout the week, often times sending out an agenda slips through the cracks. This would be effective in keeping some of us our less active members up to date. As for keeping the meeting moving, our facilitators have been effective. Something that we emphasize in facilitating is keeping the group from going off on tangents. Since we are all friends, it's easy to get sidetracked with unrelated conversations, so as facilitators we have grown more conscious of that. Since positive group interactions come pretty naturally to us in SHA, facilitators don't have to work too hard to achieve this. As mentioned previously, as facilitators we are cognizant of our newer and quieter members and we make the effort to subtly encourage them to participate in the discussion about each agenda item. If the facilitator notices that a few people in the meeting aren't really speaking or if they know we have newer members in the room, then they will utilize a "go around" – suggested by Dr. Myers-Lipton (2018) where, going in a circle, each group member is asked to share ideas, thoughts, or concerns about each agenda item. Something that could be improved in this area is the designation of a note-taker. Dr. Myers-Lipton notes that having a note-taker at each meeting is helpful since it provides a record of what took place which can be referred back to in the future or given to group members who may have missed the meeting (2018:146). Often times our meetings are relatively small, so it's common that everyone who is there wants to be active in the meeting, making it difficult to take notes. In regards to the facilitators' role in helping members become active listeners, our facilitators haven't had to take this on. Our meetings are always very engaged. In the few instances that there has been a side conversation going on, the person who is trying to speak to the group will wait until the side conversation has ceased. Usually, once the people engaged in a side conversation pick up on the groups' silence, they apologize and stop the conversation. As for decision-making, we have not yet had to make any huge decisions which required total group

consensus. Because our group is relatively large, with a mix of members with differing levels of activity, it is nearly impossible to get everyone in the same place at the same time. Therefore, most of our decisions have been made using small group consensus. Our process for voting/decision-making is pretty unstructured and could probably use some improvement, but it has been working well for us so far. Usually, these decisions center around things like what day to have an event on, how we are going to word something, who will be attending a meeting with people like lawmakers and allies, etc. For example, if we are deciding what day to have an event we will see which members can attend each day and select the day where most of us can attend. The facilitator does not have much of a role in this process other than presenting the decision to be made and voting on it themselves. This is another necessary area of improvement for us.

8.4 For us, a good decision is one in which all participating group members feel their voice was heard, and it is one which best serves the shared values and mission of the group. On the other hand, a bad decision is one which was made hastily and in spite, one which compromised the shared values and mission of the group, and one in which participating members did not have their voices heard in. As mentioned before, our decision-making process has been easy. We haven't had to make any big decisions requiring total group consensus, most decisions are about things like dates, times, and wording. We have decided that group consensus would be required for big decisions such as introducing new demands. We don't often use voting for our decisions, but it has been used. For example, when planning our two-day event prior to our meeting with President Papazian, we used voting to decide on a name for the event. We created a poll in the GroupMe app using all of the suggested names by members and then asked everyone to vote. The name with the most votes was chosen. However, this was an example of how our decision-making process remains flexible. After the name that won was selected, a member voiced concerns over the perceived connotations of the name of the event. For that reason, that name was taken out of the pool and we took a new vote. When everyone agreed they were okay with it, we proceeded with the name. We also utilize small group decision-making, but this is used more for things like scheduling. So far, our decision-making processes have worked well for us. They will need to be restructured and improved as our decisions become bigger and more implicative.