



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Building Team Activities from Student Experiences*

After several terms of working with a population of older adults-in-transition, sent to our program by a partnering agency, I was struggling to create a team-building activity similar to NASA's Space Landing Exercise. In that activity, your spaceship crashes on the moon 200 miles from the nearest space station, and you must choose items to keep from a list of supplies. The exercises are designed to teach the power of group decisions and identify group styles of interaction.

However, I preferred an exercise with tried-and-true conflict-resolution activities closer to the students' experiences. One day as the class discussed conflict-resolution issues, students began complaining about the partnering agency. Not wanting to be caught in the middle, but wanting to capitalize on their increased interest level, I decided to use their issues as examples. In doing this, I had the team-building activity that I had struggled to create.

### **Identifying Complaints**

First, I had each student list his or her own complaints and share one complaint with the class. As a class, we brainstormed to create one list of common complaints and another list of complaints generated by those in the first round.

### **Reframing Complaints into Positive Statements**

Next, the students took each complaint and wrote it as a proactive statement, identifying what they would prefer to have happen. This activity is often the most time-consuming and difficult, and groups want to return to complaining, which is far easier to do and is a more practiced activity. It is important to indicate that complaining is over and identifying solutions has begun.

The students generated complaints and resolutions. We worked to be as specific as possible. For example, "People should be nicer" should be action-specific—e.g., "The receptionist should greet me in a friendly manner." "They never tell me where I am supposed to go" should be "They should give us a map that labels the buildings."

### **Making Personal Forced-Choices**

I taught students the forced-choice method of prioritizing. Because the list was long and not on paper,

I took them through the process orally, and they marked their choices 1-32.

### **Completing the Team-Building Exercise**

Next, I divided the students into groups of five each and instructed them to share their individual top 10 choices, and then identify the group's top 10.

### **Designing Preferred Experiences**

As a next step, each group was to use its final 10 choices and design the "ideal" or "preferred" program that would address their complaints and solutions. Afterward, each group shared its design with the entire class.

### **Brainstorming Avenues**

This additional step was to brainstorm where and to whom they could take their ideas and suggestions. (This was a particularly valuable awareness-building activity.)

### **Establishing Closure**

To establish closure and formally end the activity, students assessed their team-working styles. They rated themselves on a scale of 1-5 regarding activities involved in the morning's processing—e.g., listened to others, spoke for myself, kept focused, participated—and then shared perceptions of themselves and each other within their groups.

Students were excited about their solutions and wanted to invite program designers to hear their ideas. They were surprised to learn that the designers assigned more value to their well-thought-out group concerns than they had to individual complaints; and the designers were impressed that the group had identified some potential solutions to the problems they had addressed. Students had learned about conflict resolution and practiced team-building.

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## Climb Aboard!

Imagine yourself basking lazily in the sun on a drifting sailboat. Suddenly, the sun is overshadowed by clouds, and the ocean waves become choppy. The sailboat overturns, and you find yourself frantically splashing about. Through the salt and spray, you see someone throwing a life preserver in your direction. What a relief to know that someone was willing to help!

Now imagine yourself kicked back in your chair enjoying your favorite lecture class. Then suddenly the instructor hands back the results of the last test. As your eyes desperately scan the pages, you begin to feel an overwhelming sense of suffocation. Your silent cries seem to drown in a whirlpool of emotions. You walk out of the classroom in a daze. Through salty and stinging tears you look up to see a life preserver hanging on the door of the Learning Assistance Center at North Arkansas College. There is someone who has heard your cries!

Students often find themselves drowning in a sea of school, work, and family responsibilities. Their responsibilities, compounded by feelings of hopelessness, can be overwhelming. Students often make comments such as, "I didn't even know you existed!" or "If I had known about your services sooner, I would have scored higher on that final exam!" With this in mind, the Learning Assistance Center has developed a marketing strategy that gives current and potential students a sense of hope.

The theme we have chosen is "Climb Aboard!" Our symbol is a life preserver. Three life preservers, imprinted with U.S.S. Learning Assistance Center, hang outside the center as attention-getting devices. We use the life preserver on all of our correspondence, such as bookmarks, brochures, newsletters, and flyers. We have worked with our local television station to create a video emphasizing the life preserver theme. The life preserver was a focal point during our presentation at freshman orientation where we used one as a visual enhancer, played the Beatles' song "Help!" to emphasize the auditory style, and passed out Life Savers candy as a tactile enhancer.

Currently, we are creating vests for our work-study students to wear in the computer lab. The vests will resemble life jackets and identify the students as peers who are there to help. All of these devices should attract attention and increase student awareness of our support services to the student community.

The Learning Assistance Center wants to help students learn to stay afloat academically and survive the rigors of college life. Avoiding school and personal

stress is impossible; but when a student has learned to navigate his or her own ship through both calm and troubled waters, we know that the rescue has been successful.

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**Suanne D. Roueche, Editor**

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