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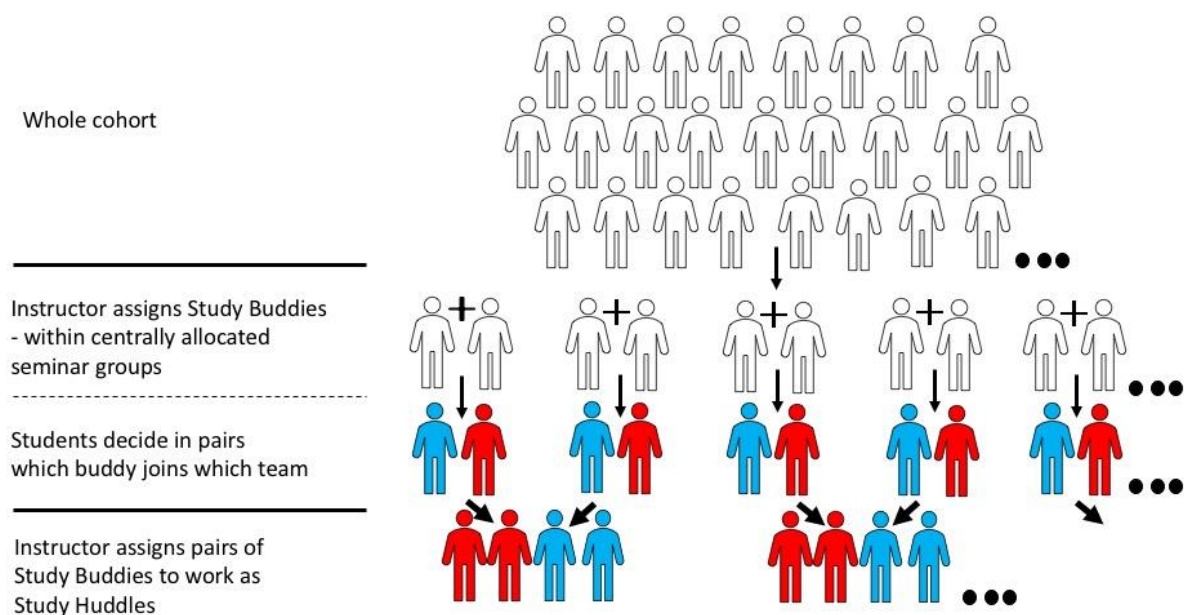
Study Buddies and Study Huddles

The biggest challenge of moving my contemporary political philosophy courses online for the pandemic has been peer learning. How do I create opportunities for students to interact, especially when they are in different time zones?

For the last three years, I have paired postgraduate students with complementary skill sets at the start of the course. As part of this buddy system, I divide required readings into three categories: everyone, Team Red, and Team Blue. Within each pair, one student is part of Team Red and the other is part of Team Blue. I let the students in each pair decide who joins which team. Students exchange notes on readings with their study buddies. The practice is intended to be supportive, not onerous. I tell students that the notes they share need to identify a reading's key thesis, the arguments it makes, and a strength or weakness, all in no more than half a page.

Because Red and Blue texts differ, study buddies are exposed to different perspectives on the same topic, but the volume of texts becomes more manageable—allowing students to engage in more close reading and less skimming. While students may lose some breadth, they gain a deeper understanding of what they have read by teaching their peers about it, and I have found that generally they do better academically.

However, there are always a few students for whom the study buddy arrangement is not as effective. To address this, and the inability to serendipitously form study groups during the pandemic, I have paired up the pairs. Two pairs of study buddies equal one study huddle.



I use huddles for breakout discussions, peer marking exercises, and engaging with asynchronous lecture content. Red and blue teams are perfect for in-class debates.

The feedback I have received from students about this system has been very positive: they feel supported. The huddles give them a more resilient method of getting through a course or module. With two members of each team in each huddle, there is always someone to discuss readings with or get notes from if one person gets sick. It's also harder to be the one apathetic person in a group of four, especially since students learn about the wrongs of free riding early in the term.