Longwood University has done a great job of integrating group projects and discussions into everyday classes. Students are held to a higher standard when paired with peers to complete work. From simple group discussions in class, to semester long group research projects, professors do a great job of making sure everyone has the opportunity to work with their peers. Collaboration is an important and sometimes challenging concept to tackle in the “adult world,” so getting practice working in these settings early on can be incredibly beneficial. Throughout my introductory level classes, I was able to build my communication skills when working in groups with my classmates. Classes such as Bio 455: Invasive Species Biology and Bio 488: Senior Capstone, I have been able to practice my group cooperation skills, while also overcoming bumps along the way. As I’ve always told myself, it’s not the mishaps that define a group, it’s how the group works to overcome those roadblocks.

In Biology 455, I worked with three other classmates to create and deliver a presentation on invasive species. We were tasked to explain what invasive species are, why they are dangerous to ecosystems, and how they are transported from one place to another. The end goal was to present our findings at the Longwood research showcase, where other peers and individuals in introductory level classes could come and observe our presentation. The most important aspect of working with a group is being able to communicate. Although one group member may take the lead, it’s important that responsibilities are split equally between the members. I vividly remember my group working together great, which isn’t always the case. We were able to create a google slides presentation, where every member had the ability to access the presentation simultaneously. We decided which member would complete what section and deadlines for when tasks needed to be completed by. Sometimes it can be hard to rely on others to do “A” level work, because some individuals care less about grades or projects than others. Luckily, our group met all the deadlines assigned, took personal time to practice the presentation, and delivered a great final product in the end.

In Biology 488, I had a slightly different experience than I did in Biology 455. During our senior year, we were placed in semester-long groups and were required to give a presentation each week. My group consisted of myself and three others. Each presentation consisted of different topics that needed to be relayed and different ways to present the information. Here, I have added two presentations from that class. The first presentation, our group was tasked with reading an assigned paper, choosing a paper of the same subject, presenting the “companion” papers information, and creating a discussion for the class to participate in. The second presentation, our group was tasked with choosing the main article of the day and giving a formal research style teaching presentation on the information. Unfortunately, this group didn’t mesh as well as my previous group had. Two of the other three members didn’t pull their weight or responding when trying to meet up for practice. Myself and one other member were stuck doing all of the work for every presentation regardless of our many efforts to encourage our partners inclusion. After not doing any work, the entire group would present and get away with stating facts that they had no part in researching. This was a very frustrating and overwhelming experience, because group projects are supposed to showcase every members strengths. After many weeks of this occurring, I decided to sit down and talk with my group members. I expressed my concerns and emotions in a mature, concerned manner. While I am not one to enjoy confrontation, I felt that it was necessary in order to finish the semester strong. This talk seemed to help and from there on out, my group not only began communicating better, but also receiving better grades. This situation gave me the reality that life can be hard in the adult world, but also hope for what’s to come.

In the end, not everyone I encounter will work well with me, but it’s how I overcome those differences that makes the difference. There will be groups who I get along with and groups who I may not see eye to eye with, but that’s life. Every experience builds character and allows me to grow in one way or another. This reflection in particular hits home, because of how important situations like these are. Working in these groups made me a better communicator, leader, and overall person.