

COMM 386
Organizational Communication
Fall, 2015

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Office Hours: T, Th 3:15-4:00; W 12:00-12:30 or by appointment

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow; learn as if you were to live forever.”
(Mahatma Gandhi)

Course Description

Whether or not you give it much thought you are surrounded by organizations. Your daily life involves encounters with schools, businesses, churches, health care systems and governments. What’s more, these same organizations are created, maintained, transformed and in some cases, destroyed by communication. The purpose of this course is to increase your awareness of communication processes central to organizing and to develop new vocabularies and skills for working with organizational communication. Your participation in the course should help you better understand how organizational communication contributes to your overall quality of work life, and to identify important challenges facing an organization and the role of communication in working well with those challenges.

Course Objectives

By semester’s end, you will be able to:

1. Explain various approaches to organization and their implications for a variety of communication processes;
2. Apply course concepts to better understand and work with the communication challenges organizations face, and
3. Draw upon knowledge of organizational communication to better understand and if necessary, negotiate the conditions of your work life.

Required Reading

Miller, K.I. (2015). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes* (7th edition). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

A small set of additional required readings are available via Blackboard.

Course Schedule

8/25 **Introduction to course**

8/27 **The Challenge of Organizational Communication**

READ: Chapter 1

9/1 **Classical Approaches**

READ: Chapter 2

9/3 **Classical Approaches**

Activity: Re-creating the Classical Era Skits

**DUE: Organization or Organizational Member Fact Sheet (submitted individually)*

9/8 **Human Relations & Resources**

READ: Chapter 3

9/10 **Human Relations & Resources**

PREPARE: "Teamwork at Marshall's Processing Plant" case, pp. 58-59

QUIZ #1: Chapters 1, 2, 3

9/15 **Systems Theory**

READ: Chapter 4, pp. 60-71

READ: "The Staff Breakdown" Case (posted to Blackboard)

9/17 **Systems Theory**

READ: "Case in Point: Making Sense of My Money", pp. 70

9/22 **Cultural Approaches**

READ: Chapter 4, pp. 71-81

9/24 **Cultural Approaches**

PREPARE: "The Cultural Tale of Two Shuttles", pp. 79-81

**DUE: Identifying Challenges (submitted by partners)*

9/29 **Constitutive Approaches**
READ: Chapter 5, pp. 82-89
VIEW: Communicative Constitution of Organizations with Matt Koschmann

10/1 **Constitutive Approaches**
READ: Chapter 5, pp. 90-98

10/6 **Critical Approaches**
READ: Chapter 6

10/8 **Critical Approaches**
VIEW: Clips from “Office Space” and “Modern Times”

QUIZ #2: Chapters 4, 5, 6

10/13 **Socialization Processes**
READ: Chapter 7

10/15 **Socialization Processes**
READ: Chapter 7

**DUE: Preliminary Analysis (submitted by partners)*

10/20 **No Class – Fall Break!**

10/22 **Conflict Management Processes**
READ: Chapter 9
PREPARE: “Bob’s Dilemma” Case (posted to Blackboard)

10/27 **Conflict Management Processes**
PREPARE: “The Problem with Teamwork” case, pp. 174-175

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| 10/29 | Emotion Processes in the Workplace READ: Chapter 11 |
| 11/3 | Emotion Processes in the Workplace READ: Chapter 11 |
| ----- | |
| 11/5 | Organizational Diversity Processes READ: Chapter 12 |
| 11/10 | Organizational Diversity Processes READ: "Tensions in Talking Diversity" by Linda Gallant & Kathy Krone (posted on Blackboard) |
| | QUIZ #3: Chapters 7, 9, 11, 12 |
| ----- | |
| 11/12 | Technological Processes READ: Chapter 13 |
| 11/17 | NCA Meeting Class does not meet |
| 11/19 | NCA Meeting Class does not meet |
| ----- | |
| 11/24 | Paper Project Check-ins |
| 11/26 | NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break! |
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| 12/1 | Changing Landscape of Organizations READ: Chapter 14 |
| 12/3 | Changing Landscape of Organizations |
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| 12/8 | Communication Project Presentations Course evaluation |
| 12/10 | Communication Project Presentations Course wrap-up <i>*DUE: Project and Case Analysis Papers (submitted by partners)</i> |

Course Requirements

Quizzes (150 points)

You will be required to complete three 50-point quizzes each of which is designed to assess your understanding of course concepts. Each quiz will consist of 10 three-point multiple choice items and one 20-point essay question. As you complete each quiz you will be able to refer to any hand-written notes you've developed from the assigned reading material. I am providing the essay questions in advance and they include:

Quiz 1: Consider the foundational ideas that make up the classical approach and the human relations/resources approach to organizations and communication. Select *four* of these ideas that you believe have the greatest potential to affect the quality of work life for you and for others. Explain each idea and the connections you see with work life quality.

Quiz 2: Select and describe two foundational ideas that make up systems, cultural, constitutive and critical approaches to organizational communication (for a total of 8 ideas). Based on these ideas, which approach has the potential to make the greatest difference in quality of work life?

Quiz 3: Consider the foundational ideas associated with organizational socialization, conflict, emotion and diversity processes. Select and describe *four* of these and their implications for improving and eroding the quality of work life.

Communication Paper Project Assignments (200 points)

Working first as individuals and then in pairs, you have the option of completing one of two projects. The first option requires you to develop an analysis of an organizational member's quality of work life, while the second requires you to develop an analysis of a nonprofit organization's communication challenges and to design a communication project to assist the organization in meeting one of those challenges. Both projects require the completion of a set of building block assignments which are detailed next.

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| OPTION 1: Quality of Work Life Project |
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Organizational Member Fact Sheet (20 points) – Working as individuals, identify a member of a local organization whom you have access to. The fact sheet should include the individual's name (or pseudo-name), your relationships with him/her, the official name of his/her organization, how long s/he has been employed by the organization and the nature of his/her work there. Then briefly discuss this person's stake in the organization? How important is the organization to his/her well-being? (due September 3, about one page, typed, double-spaced)

Identifying Quality of Work Life Challenges (30 points) – Working in pairs summarize what you've learned about the quality of work life challenges this person experiences and how

communication may be figuring in to those challenges. (due September 24, about two pages, typed, double-spaced)

Preliminary Analysis (50 points) – Select three course concepts and develop a preliminary analysis of how each concept speaks to the overall quality of this person’s work life. (due October 15, about three pages, typed, double-spaced)

Final Paper & Presentation (100 points) – Develop your analysis further to include a set of 10 concepts that help explain the overall quality of this person’s work life. Then discuss how this same set of concepts could be drawn upon to improve his/her work life quality. See the attached assignment sheet for additional requirements for Option 1. (due December 10)

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| OPTION 2: Organizational Communication Challenges Project |
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Organizational Fact Sheet (20 points) – Working as individuals identify a local, nonprofit organization that you have access to. The fact sheet should include the official name of the organization, a description of its purpose/mission, a description of what’s at stake if this organization succeed or fails, the name of a contact person and his/her contact information. (due September 3; about one page, typed, double-spaced)

Identifying Organizational Communication Challenges (30 points) – Working in pairs, summarize what you’ve learned about the organization’s challenges, especially its communication challenges. (due September 24; about two pages, typed, double-spaced)

Preliminary Analysis and Action Plan (50 points) – Select three course concepts and develop a preliminary analysis of a local organization and its communication based on these. Then sketch out the contours of a communication project or two that might help the organization meet one of these challenges. Ideas for projects are endless but may include ways to strengthen the organization’s visibility in the local community or to help organize information or a communication system. Given the resource challenges of many nonprofit organizations, even a small project can make a meaningful difference. (due October 15; about three pages, typed, double-spaced)

Final Paper Project & Presentation (100 points) – Develop your analysis further to include a set of 6 concepts, a presentation of the communication project you developed and how it helps meet one of this organization’s communication challenges. (due December 10)

Attendance & Participation (50 points)

These points can be earned in a variety of ways throughout the semester. As many as **25 points** can be earned simply by attending class on a consistent basis and contributing to class discussions. An additional **25 points** can be earned on your work to develop a formal discussion question around a concept you consider foundational to one of the chapters as it relates to a

current organizational situation that strikes you as important. Submit a brief summary of the problematic situation, the concept or concepts you wish to highlight and the discussion question.

Workload

The reading and assignments for this course are consistent with the workload recommended for a 300-level course. You can expect to work approximately two hours outside of class for every hour that you are in class.

Grading

Your final grade will be determined based on your performances on the following:

| | Possible points | Earned points |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Quiz #1 | 50 | _____ |
| Quiz #2 | 50 | _____ |
| Quiz #3 | 50 | _____ |
| Building block #1 | 20 | _____ |
| Building block #2 | 30 | _____ |
| Building block #3 | 50 | _____ |
| Paper Project | 100 | _____ |
| Attendance & Participation | 25 | _____ |
| Discussion Leadership | 25 | _____ |
| | | Total _____ (400 possible) |

Course Policies

Class Climate

While I do lecture nearly each day, I also value and seek to develop a class climate that welcomes and respects your participation. Please respect each other and everyone's learning experience by paying attention to others' contributions and making your own contributions to class discussion. Behaviors such as arriving late or leaving early on a regular basis, texting, sleeping during class, or carrying on conversations with your neighbors fail to support a climate of engagement and learning and may adversely affect your participation points.

Technology Use

Please turn off cell phones while present in class. If you choose to use your laptop during class, keep in mind that using them for reasons other than note-taking or to sometimes locate interesting examples related to class discussion is distracting to those sitting near and behind you.

Course policies, cont.

Missed Classes

If you need to miss class, I will assume it is due to unavoidable circumstances. Please contact a reliable classmate for notes, handouts and his/her insights about that day's discussion. If you would like to pursue the possibility of an excused absence, please provide official documentation explaining your absence.

Late Work

In order to treat individual students and the entire class fairly, late work will not be accepted without penalty. Accepting late work without penalty indirectly devalues other students' grades and the potential sacrifices they may have made to submit their work on time. In addition, each student in the class likely could produce stronger work if he or she had been given extra time to complete the assignment. Work submitted late will be evaluated as usual and then the grade will be lowered one letter for each day of lateness.

Quiz Make-Ups

Please make every effort to complete the quizzes on the assigned date. If you are unable to attend class on the day a quiz is scheduled, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance. A single make-up exam will be offered during finals week.

Pass/No Pass Option

If you have elected the pass/no pass option in this course, you must receive at least a grade of "C" in order to pass. A grade of "C" also is needed in order to count this course toward a major in Communication Studies.

Academic Honesty

Your participation in this course should be guided by all standards for academic honesty set forth in our university guidelines. Please read and abide by the Academic Honesty policy at <http://www.unl.edu/regrec/acadserv/book.html> and <http://www.unl.edu/sja/>. The Student Code of Conduct also is printed in the back of the UNL Undergraduate Studies Bulletin.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Total Points and Final Grades

It is possible to earn a total of 400 points in this class. The grading scale is as follows:

| <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Minimum Points</u> | <u>Grade</u> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 98 – 100% | 392 | A+ |
| 93-97 | 372 | A |
| 90-92 | 360 | A- |
| 87 – 89 | 348 | B+ |
| 83-86 | 332 | B |
| 80 – 82 | 320 | B- |
| 77 – 79 | 308 | C+ |
| 73-76 | 292 | C |
| 70 – 72 | 280 | C- |
| 67 – 69 | 268 | D+ |
| 63-66 | 252 | D |
| 60 – 62 | 240 | D- |
| less than 60 | 239 | F |

Enjoy the course!

COMM 386
Introduction to Organizational Communication

Option 1: Quality of Work Life Paper Project

The purpose of this assignment is to gain practice using theoretical concepts to better understand how organizational arrangements and communication processes contribute to and disrupt the quality of work life. You can think of the final paper project as emerging in part from the sequence of building block assignments that you will have completed throughout the semester. The final paper should include the following:

1. A creative title page and professional appearance
2. An introduction that includes a statement of your purpose for developing this analysis and project (about ½ page)
3. A rationale for why this person's experience deserves study (about ½ page)
4. A brief description of the organization including what it seeks to accomplish (about 1 page)
5. A brief description of this person's work role and the nature of his/her experience with the organization (about 1 page)
6. An analysis of this person's quality of work life drawing connections between his/her experience and ten course concepts (four-five pages)
7. Your recommendations for changes in communication that would enhance QWL (about 1 page)
8. A conclusion summarizing what you've learned about communication and nonprofit organizations based on your project and paper. (about ½ page)
9. Attach a list of references that include the Miller textbook, any supplemental readings you drew from and/or sources related to the organization.

The text of your papers (not including the title page, references or attachments) **should be between 8-10 pages (typed, double-spaced) and will be due in class Thursday, December 10.**

COMM 386
Introduction to Organizational Communication

Option 2: Organizational Communication Challenges Paper Project

The purpose of this assignment is to gain practice using theoretical concepts to better understand an organization's communication challenges and to design a communication project that can help meet those challenges. You can think of the final paper/project as emerging in part from the sequence of building block assignments that you will have completed throughout the semester. The final paper should include the following:

1. A creative title page and professional appearance
2. An introduction that includes a statement of your purpose for developing this analysis and project (about ½ page)
3. A rationale for why this organization deserves study and your assistance (about ½ page)
4. A brief description of the organization and what it seeks to accomplish (about 1 page)
5. A description of the organization's communication challenges (1-2 pages)
6. A discussion of three course concepts that help explain these challenges (1-2 pages)
7. A description of your communication project and how it is designed to help the organization meet one or more of its communication challenges (about 2 pages)
8. A conclusion summarizing what you've learned about organizational communication based on your project. (about ½ page)
9. Attach a list of references that include the Miller textbook, any supplemental readings you drew from and/or sources related to the organization.
10. Attach a representation of your project in sufficient detail that I'll be able to understand your efforts and give you full credit for your work.

The text of your papers (not including the title page, references or attachments) **should be between 8-10 pages (typed, double-spaced) and will be due in class Thursday, December 10.**