

COM 485: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION THEORY

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00; appointments welcome (face-to-face or by phone).

Course Web Site: Blackboard: <http://courseinfo.unl.edu>

Required Readings:

Beebe, S. A., & Masterson, J. T. (2012). *Communicating in small groups* (10th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Larson, C. E., & LaFasto, F. M. (1989). *Teamwork: What must go right, what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ancillary readings (TBA)

Data for course project available on blackboard

MISSION OF DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The role and mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies are to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, and societies. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages. The department's research, teaching, and service devote particular attention to understanding the ways in which communication erodes and sustains collaboration within and among local, national, and global communities.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Communication is one of the pillars of our personal and professional lives. Communicating in small groups and teams is a significant part of the human experience and the ability to understand and communicate effectively in groups is an important element of personal and professional success. Thus, small group communication is well worth our attention and study. The roles of leader and group or team participant are often misunderstood and problematic roles for many reasons. In this course we will focus on the behavior of groups, leaders, and members as inherently *communicative*.

This is a class in theory and we will dig in and study small group communication theory, research, and practice from several different perspectives, and centered on one theory deeply and in a very practical way, focusing on how individual and group behavior *emerges from communication* in task-oriented groups. Our goal is to expand our practical knowledge and our repertoire of communicative choices when working with groups. We will learn together by *reading*, *applying* materials to communication behaviors outside of the classroom, *attending* class sessions, *participating* in class discussions and experiences, and *experiencing* research opportunities. We will make extensive use of naturalistic group interaction as a learning tool.

EXPECTATIONS OF CLASS MEMBERS

Attendance & Contribution: Learning involves knowledge + experience; it is *active*, rather than passive. We are all teachers and learners together. In that spirit, your presence, preparation, and active, meaningful participation are central to your own learning and that of your class colleagues (professor included). Class members are *expected to be on time, in attendance for all class sessions and to attend entire class sessions*. It is important that members are *prepared* for class by completing readings prior to class and are prepared to discuss and work with the reading material in class. Class discussions, exercises, and videos will be incorporated into examinations and class project. Thus, you need more than what appears on slides. Please bring textbooks, video transcripts, and Reading Guides to class. Class members are responsible for all information and any changes announced in class and/or posted on the class website. Attendance and meaningful class contribution are evaluated.

Group Participation. This is a class focused on small group teamwork and we will complete a project in small groups. While we will have some class time for group meetings, groups will likely need to meet out of class. IF you cannot do this, this is not the class for you to take. Groups should expect good participation from each member. Groups may fire an under-participating member with the professor's approval and that member will not be able to complete the assignment.

Technology Use. It is necessary to articulate a shared policy on technology use. Students are welcome to use *laptop computers* in class to take notes for our class. Any other uses of a computer (e.g., other work, email, internet sites) takes away from the academic atmosphere (and student colleagues do notice and complain) and is prohibited. If you cannot abide by this policy, take notes with paper and pen. Turn off ringers on *mobile phones*, put them under your down or turn them over and do not check them or text message during class. If you are expecting an emergency call, please let me know in advance. If you wish to use *recording devices* in class, please talk this over with me in advance.

Perspectives. We may be exposed to perspectives different than our own in our readings, class experiences, or from what class members discuss in the class. Class members are asked to treat respectfully the opinions and experiences of others in the class. One does not need to agree with someone to treat them respectfully.

Completion of work. Assignments are due at the time and date assigned. This policy is enforced in fairness to all class members. Deductions are taken for late work (10% per 24 hours late, weekends included), except in extreme circumstances. All work is to be submitted electronically. Computer, email, printer, or transportation problems do *not* constitute an excuse for late or incomplete work. Class members must complete *all* assignments and exams to pass this course. Class members are encouraged to keep a copy of all work handed in and to make regular backups of computer files and disks.

Accommodations. The professor has a long scholarly and personal commitment to issues surrounding disability. 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 (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Incompletes are rarely given and must be negotiated before the end of the semester.

Pass-Fail: Class members taking the course Pass/Fail must earn a grade of 74% ("C") or better to receive credit for the course. C- grades are not passing.

Communication Studies Majors must earn a grade of 74% ("C") or better to receive credit for the course. C-grades will not count toward the major.

Email: Class members should check their email account regularly. I will send messages out and post information on Blackboard. Be sure to check your email!

ASSIGNMENTS & EXAMS

Reading Guides are questions to answer for each chapter. The guides will be available on blackboard and correspond to reading or chapters due each week. Use these documents as you read (suggestion: read the chapter first and then go back and answer the questions). Bring the completed guides to each class period in preparation for class discussion and exercises (these are not graded but we will use them).

Quizzes: To help students come ready to work with the readings in class and to spread testing out from in-class exams, *weekly in-class quizzes will be given at the start of class* covering all reading assignments due for the

week. Questions will come from the answers to the Reading Guides for that week. Quizzes will include multiple choice, true-false questions and short fill-in questions. Students are encouraged to ask any questions about the reading material before the quiz via visits to office hours, email, or right before class. There will be one practice quiz not counted toward the final grade. *We will drop the lowest quiz score*, in case a student does not fare well on a quiz, is ill, or is absent. There are **no make-up, early, or late quizzes given**.

Exams: There will be two written exams covering class discussions, experiences, and reading materials. Students are encouraged to take complete notes during class to facilitate learning and exam review. Exams will include largely essay questions. A Review Guide will be available for the exams.

Semester Project: Students will complete a semester project divided into two papers. The project will be completed by groups chosen by students. Each group will perform a (a) group communication case study on a group for which we have previously compiled audiotaped meetings, meeting transcripts, and group member journals. Students will analyze the group, carrying out a case study on the group and applying the theories we are studying, and (b) a case analysis on their own group. Groups will meet face-to-face and via different technologies. Papers will be submitted on time via email attachment; uploaded via safe assignment.

Oral Exam: Each individual student will schedule and participate an individual oral exam with Dr. Braithwaite during the last weeks of class. I have used oral exams in the class for over 20 years as way to engage with students over what they have learned. This is our opportunity to discuss each student's knowledge of the group studied for the semester project, the student's analysis of the group, and the student's analysis of the case study of their own group. There are no make-up oral exams and no grade will be recorded for the Paper #2 without completion of the oral exam.

EVALUATION OF WORK

Communication Studies faculty assume that all students enter courses with the ability to earn at least a "C" grade in the course. Students who meet *minimum* requirements will earn a "C" for that work. Students who earn "B" and "A" grades *exceed* the minimum requirements. Graduate and undergraduate students will be graded based on expectations appropriate for their class level and the program.

A= EXCELLENT. *Greatly exceeds* requirements. Shows outstanding creativity, skill, initiative, effort

B= GOOD. *Exceeds* requirements. Shows substantial creativity, skills, initiative, and/or effort

C= AVERAGE. *Meets* the requirements in *every* respect, but does not exceed requirements

D= BELOW AVERAGE. Meets *some* requirements, but *deficient* in others

E= POOR. Deficient in *most or all* requirements

Point Distribution:

Quizzes	70	7 x 10 pts. (8 quizzes; drop lowest score)
Exam #1	100	
Exam #2	100	
Paper #1	100	
Paper #2 & Oral	120	
Contribution	<u>20</u>	TOTAL =510

GRADING SCALE

A+	98-100%	C	73-77%
A	93-97%	C-	70-72%
A-	90-92%	D+	68-69%
B+	88-89%	D	63-67%
B	83-87%	D-	60-62%
B-	80-82%	F	59% and below
C+	78-79%		

Extra Credit: Periodic extra credit opportunities will be announced in class or on email). Students may earn up to 10 points of extra (generally, extra opportunities are worth five points each). Three options:

(a) Participate in a Dept. of Communication Studies research study. I will receive notice of your participation at the end of the semester and I will not know which study you took part in (one study = 5 points)

(b) Attend a lecture or campus event related to small group communication (teams, leadership, etc.). Check suitability advance with the professor. Provide proof of attendance and write up a one-page essay describing what you learned about communication (one lecture = essay = 5 points).

(c) Read *two (2) articles relevant to groups or teams* in *Communication Currents*, the online communication e-zine from the National Communication Association. <http://www.communicationcurrents.com/> will take you to the most recent issue of *Communication Currents* and you may go to the box at the end, choose “Archives” to find the back issues. Outline the main points of the two articles in one page (include the citation from *Communication Currents*). For each article (a) briefly discuss what groups of people, outside of students, would benefit from reading the article (e.g. those in a particular industry, nonprofit group, government agency, etc.). Explain why these people would find this article useful and (b) present one relevant question you have about the research topic that you believe is not answered in the article (two articles = 5 points).

All extra credit must be completed and submitted no later than the last day of classes (before finals week). Students must complete all assignments before earning extra credit. Send electronically to Dr. Braithwaite

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Violations of academic integrity are *very serious* matters and will result in automatic failure of the class, and referral to the proper university officials. The work a student submits in a class is expected to be the student's own work and must be new work completed for this particular class and assignment. Building on your old project or working on a similar topic in two classes is normally fine with this professor; however students must clear this with all professors, present and past, *before* starting the project. If starting with work done by a group, present or past, students must have permission of all group members to use that work.

Academic dishonesty includes handing in another's work or part of another's work as your own, turning in one of your old papers for a current class, turning in the same or similar past or current paper for two different classes, presenting a group project as your work solely, purchasing or otherwise obtaining research or papers written by another and turning that work in as your own. Using unauthorized notes or other study aids or otherwise obtaining another's answers for an examination represents a breach of academic integrity. Sanctions are applied whether violation was intentional or not. You must keep all original data for projects for at least six months (i.e. articles, questionnaires, interview tapes) and be prepared to present them to the professor when asked.

Plagiarism means intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own. This includes your own previous work. Plagiarism includes quoting or paraphrasing from other sources without acknowledging/citing the source of your information or presenting quoted material as your own words. You must be very clear about attribution of sources and you must know how to cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to cite sources should purchase a style manual such as APA (American Psychological Association). Claiming lack of knowledge about standards for writing is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism committed.

The penalty for academic misconduct will be automatic failure of the assignment and, depending on the infraction, the course. A report of academic misconduct will be filed with the Dean of Students.

I appreciate the perspective Dr. Stephen Cooper of Marshall University articulates on plagiarism: “Plagiarism is a fool's shortcut. Not only do you cheat yourself of the opportunity to learn and grow, but also you expose yourself to severe academic penalties. Plagiarism is dishonest. In the I Ching there is a saying that sincerity inspires respect. Earn your self-respect through your own effort.” Academic dishonesty hurts us all. It makes a mockery of what we are all doing here. The penalty is severe and it can hurt you now and in the future. Please do not do it. No one wants to see you have these kinds of problems with your work, so please start assignments early and seek help when you need it. Come to a faculty member for help if you are at all unsure about any of these issues or seek help at the UNL Writing Assistance Center: 472-8803, Andrews Hall 129.