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# COMM 286: Business & Professional Communication

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## Course Syllabus | Fall 2017

### Course Description and Objectives

One doesn't have to look far to see the importance employers place on good communication skills in prospective hires. In fact, the 2016 National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook once again rates verbal and written communication skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work effectively in a team as among the most highly desired characteristics in new and potential employees. It's no secret that the ability to effectively communicate your ideas in public and interpersonal spaces in the professional environment and to negotiate workplace relationships often means the difference between getting that promotion and being passed over for it. Evidence of your ability to communicate well is one of the top skills that interviewers assess when evaluating job candidates. **But what does it really mean to have good communication skills?** In this class, you will develop and refine your oral communication skills so that you will be able to apply them in your workplace interactions, at the interpersonal level, in teams, and in a more public space. But achieving "good communication" in organizational contexts depends upon far more than organizational members' possession and execution of these often taken for granted and under-developed skills. Therefore, as you develop your oral communication skills set in this course, we will examine communication issues that are important to contemporary organizations, as well as the communication-based problems with which they grapple.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Use theories and concepts to advance your understanding of communication
- Use theories and concepts to expand your communicative repertoire to help you successfully navigate professional life
- Develop/enhance your ability to research, organize, and deliver professional oral presentations
- Develop/enhance impromptu speaking skills
- Develop/enhance teamwork skills and specific strategies to work effectively in teams
- Use theories and concepts to understand and intelligently discuss communication issues and challenges in contemporary professional life

### Required Reading & Resources

Adler, R.B., Elmhorst, J. & Lucas, K. (2013). *Communicating at work: Strategies for success in business and the professions*. [Customized e-textbook for the University of Nebraska Lincoln]. Lincoln, NE: McGraw Hill.

The required text for this course is a customized e- textbook hosted by McGraw-Hill. The access code can be purchased EITHER directly through McGraw-Hill at the link provided in your Canvas course shell OR it can be purchased at the University Book Store.

The required text for this course is a custom package found only through the University Bookstore on campus or directly from McGraw-Hill online. In addition to the text chapters that have been drawn from multiple texts, the faculty have included content in the textbook package necessary for success in this course. Further, the faculty have worked directly with the publisher to provide a cost-effective package to UNL students in the e-book format. Students taking this course are expected to utilize the components of the package available in the bookstore or online.

### **ACE Credit**

COMM 286 satisfies ACE Outcome 2A: *demonstrate communication competence by employing a repertoire of communication skills for developing and maintaining professional and personal relationships*. In this course, you will learn concepts, theories, and techniques of effective communication that will facilitate professional relationships in the workplace. Course content surveys concepts associated with interpersonal communication, small group communication, organizational communication, and public communication. Areas of emphasis for skill development in this course include learning how to work effectively in problem-solving teams and delivering impromptu, prepared, and group speeches (including research, organization of material, delivery, visual aids).

### **Assignments & Quizzes**

Your final grade will be determined based on your performance on the following. **Please Note:** You are expected to read all assignment descriptions, grade rubrics, and pay attention to your specific instructors for all assignments. *Each assignment and quiz is an assessment of how well you are understanding and applying concepts presented in class via the textbook, lectures, and in-class discussions*. You are encouraged to work with your instructor to clarify questions prior to completing your work. Full details for each assignment will be posted in Canvas. You are expected to do your best work on each quiz and assignment. Thus, you are encouraged to proactively ask questions and work with your instructor before you finalize your assignment submission. **No assignment may be re-done for credit.**

**Quizzes (5 @ 40 points each).** You are expected to read all assigned reading with attention to detail and a focus on understanding. You are expected to watch and take notes over the lectures assigned for the week before you meet in your weekly assessment period. These quizzes will be designed to test your knowledge and mastery of the concepts presented in the course material. There will be six total content-based quizzes, each worth 40 points. You can drop your lowest score.

**Student Information Sheet (10 points).** You will fill out, sign, and submit the student information sheet. To receive the full 10 points, you must submit it through Canvas (5pts) and turn in a hard copy to your instructor (5pts). This ensures you know how to submit your work in this class (through Canvas) and provides your instructor with an opportunity to get to know you. Be sure to ask questions if you have difficulty submitting this through Canvas.

**Team Strategic Plan (15 points).** You will prepare a team strategic plan that includes team specific goals for the final project and a clear strategy for completing the final team project. This strategy will include team member contact information, specific assigned team member roles, a team meeting schedule for the semester, anticipated schedule of completion for project milestones, a meeting agenda, and an overall team communication plan informed by course concepts.

**Critical Analysis of Team Experience (30 points).** Toward the end of the semester you use what you have learned about communicating in teams this semester to critically reflect on your team's effectiveness in light of what you have learned. You will also analyze your own effectiveness as a team member within this particular team, to include a consideration of how what you have learned throughout the experience can translate to your future team work. The finished product should demonstrate the knowledge you have acquired throughout the course related to communicating in teams to demonstrate your proficiency with the new material.

**Impromptu Speech (30 points).** You will deliver one unrehearsed speech on a topic chosen by your instructor.

**Individual Speech (150 points).** You will research, organize, and deliver a professional oral presentation that focuses on business-related issues. You are free to choose your business related issue; however, you should make an effort to incorporate your newly enhanced communication vocabulary into the outline and speech. This assignment includes points for the outline (50 pts) and an in-class presentation (100 pts).

**Team Communication Consultant Presentation (100 points).** With your teammates, you will research and organize a professional, cohesive team business PowerPoint presentation that identifies and analyzes a real world problem that a specific industry or organization is currently facing. You will consider that problem from a communication standpoint and propose a communication-based solution to the problem using your own research as well as insights and vocabulary from our lectures and textbook.

**Extra Credit (10 points maximum).** You may earn extra credit in a number of ways. You can earn extra credit by **(1) participating in research studies, (2) rehearsing your speech delivery in the Communication Studies Speech Lab, (3) conducting and reporting on a Career Research interview that you conduct in a field that you wish to learn more about, (4) visiting Career Services for a mock interview, (5) reporting on course related campus or community presentations, or (6) writing short papers that link course concepts to current events.** Please speak with your instructor early in the semester to identify options for extra credit. When you participate in research studies, you can earn 5 points for each research credit (studies can be worth one research credit or multiple research credits—please pay close attention to the informed consent form of the study). Alternatively, you can earn 5 points of extra credit for each one half hour spent engaging in an approved extra credit activity--please speak with your instructor to learn about options. All extra credit is due by the end of Week 15. See Canvas and talk to your instructor for details on extra credit opportunities in your particular section of the course. You may earn a maximum of 10 extra credit points total for this course.

## Expectations

*Self-Direction and Personal Responsibility for Success.* **Your success in this course is dependent on your ability to take control of your learning experience—develop a personal plan and commit to being responsible for coming to your assessment periods fully prepared.** In addition to the communication skills and teamwork skills you will be learning in this class, employers list self-direction and self-motivation as highly desirable skills in today's workplace. This class has been designed to promote your development of these skills. You will be expected to take personal responsibility for the weekly material presented online—the readings from the text, the weekly online lectures and the supplemental online material posted for your professional and personal development as communicators.

*Respect and Contributing to Positive, Productive Classroom Culture.* As students in a business and professional communication course, you are expected to remain professional in your interactions in your classroom, with your peers, and with your instructor. Each student contributes to the classroom culture, and contributes to an environment that shapes the learning process. You are expected to respectfully engage in class activities, class assignments, class discussions, team meetings, and meetings with your instructor. When disagreements do occur, you are encouraged to state your perspective in a respectful manner and listen respectfully to others. Respect for yourself, your peers, your instructor, and the classroom as a whole are imperative.

*Grade Discussions.* Your instructors work hard to provide detailed feedback on each assignment in this course. This feedback is designed to facilitate the learning process and to help you further develop/enhance your communication skills across professional contexts. You are expected to read and think through the feedback carefully so that you can apply it the next time you have an opportunity to do so. If, after considering your feedback, you do not understand it, you are encouraged to schedule an appointment with your instructor or stop into your instructor's office hours for clarification so that you can take the feedback and engage it in ways that will help you improve.

*Academic Honesty.* Just as ethics are important in business, they also are important in educational settings. Academic honesty and integrity are expected in this course. Any student who is found to have engaged in an act of academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating, plagiarism, complicity, misrepresenting excuses for missing class for turning in late work) will automatically fail the assignment. Additionally, he or she may fail the course and/or be reported to his or her academic advisor and Dean for further action. Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse for academic dishonesty. Please read **Article 3, Section B-1 of the UNL Student Code of Conduct** (<http://stuafs.unl.edu/DeanofStudents/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20May%20Rev%202014%20a.pdf>) for definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty.

**Please note: It is possible to plagiarize yourself.** You may not submit work that you completed in a prior semester (for this or any other class) for a grade in the current semester. **Doing this constitutes self-plagiarism.** If you have questions about this, please talk with your instructor.

*Attendance & Timeliness.* It is important that you attend class each day. Assignments and quizzes given in class cannot be made up in the event of unexcused absences. Excused absences will be

granted only for (a) documented personal illness or injury; (b) representing the university in an official capacity (athletic events, ROTC, academic conferences, etc.); or (c) a death in the family. Documentation is required in all cases, regardless of reason.

Students must provide satisfactory documentation (as determined by the instructor) for all absences within 1 week of the absence so the instructor can determine if the absence is excused. Failure to provide documentation within this time frame will result in an automatic unexcused absence.

Timeliness is as important as attendance. Therefore, if you are late to class and miss a quiz or other point-bearing assignment, you will not be allowed to make it up unless your tardiness is excused with proper documentation.

*Participation.* You are expected to participate actively in the course, both in your approach to taking notes over the reading material as well as the online lectures AND in your participation in the assessment meetings. In order to do so, you should prepare yourself by reading assignments and watching lectures before your assessment meetings and thinking critically about the material. Although you are encouraged to challenge ideas, you must show respect for people who share differing viewpoints in support of a climate that encourages participation from everyone.

*Assignment Turn In.* All assignments must be submitted through Canvas as explained in each assignment description. Assignments will not be accepted via email or any other format. It is your responsibility to use Canvas effectively to turn in your assignments and to ensure that your assignment is properly submitted before the assignment due date according to course specifications. PLEASE NOTE: Your assignments MUST be Microsoft Word documents. If you are saving your assignments on your MAC, you must add the .doc or .docx file extension to your document in order for it to be accepted.

*Deadlines.* Meeting deadlines is very important and a mark of professionalism. All assignments are due to Canvas by the start of class time on the assigned day. Unless specifically noted in the assignment description, late assignments will be accepted up to four days beyond the due date, with a 20% deduction of the total points possible for every calendar day they are late, beginning the minute class begins on the date the assignment was due. Assignments will not be accepted more than four calendar days past the due date. In the event of a missed speech, you will not be able to make up the speech except in the case of verified illnesses, funerals, or university-supported activities.

All speeches, quizzes and other point-bearing assignments missed due to an *excused* absence must be made up no later than 1 week following the excused absence, at the convenience of your instructor (in office hours, by appointment, etc). Failure to make assignments up within 1 week of the excused absence will result in a loss of the opportunity to make up the assignment and will result in a zero. Point bearing assignments missed due to an *unexcused* absence cannot be made up.

*Written Work.* The work you turn in should reflect your professionalism. All written assignments must be typed and proofread for errors. Handwritten work will not be accepted.

*Grade Appeals.* In the event you believe you were assigned a lower grade on an assignment or speech presentation than you believe you earned, you are encouraged to talk with instructor about your concerns. All discussions of grades must follow the **24/7 Rule**. That means that you must wait 24 hours after your instructor has returned your grade and feedback to you to initiate your complaint. This is to allow you sufficient time to thoroughly review and carefully consider the feedback that has been offered to you on the assignment. Additionally, you must initiate your complaint within 7 calendar days of receiving the grade. This is to ensure that the review occurs in a timely manner, while the assignment, the assessment, and the feedback remain top of mind for both the student and the instructor. The following steps must be completed in order to appeal an assigned grade:

1. Read through all of the comments provided on your assignment or presentation feedback sheet. Re-evaluate your own submission based on this feedback.
2. Take at least 24 hours to determine if you truly disagree with the grade or if you are simply dissatisfied with your performance on the assignment. This is a critical step in this process.
3. If you determine you disagree with the evaluation after considering this, schedule a meeting or stop into office hours to respectfully discuss your specific concerns with your instructor. This is an opportunity for you to learn from the feedback. Ask for an explanation relevant to the problem areas in the presentation that he or she identified.
4. If, after considering this discussion, you remain in disagreement with the assessment, develop a written argument supporting your perspective and the reasons for your continued disagreement to be formally submitted to your instructor. In this argument, you should describe specifically how you believe your submitted work demonstrates a better grasp of the principles and concepts outlined in the text, lecture, and your section's in class meetings with your instructor than was assessed in the specific areas of the evaluation that you are contesting. If this was a presentation as opposed to a written assignment, submit the outline you worked from, the feedback sheet and your written argument in support of your perspective. Do this within 7 days of your grade being posted in Canvas.
5. Your instructor will carefully review your submission and make a grade determination. Please note that when an assignment is re-evaluated, the entire assignment is re-evaluated. While grades under complaint may remain the same, they are subject to modification up or down depending on the instructor's subsequent overall review of the assignment.
6. Once your instructor has made his/her decision on the appeal, you will be provided with a written response. If, after considering this response, you remain in disagreement with your instructor's assessment, you may file a written grade appeal with the COMM 286 Course Director, providing clear documentation to support your continued disagreement with your instructor.
7. If the continued disagreement involves a presentation grade, you must provide evidence in your written grade appeal to the COMM 286 Course Director to support that the appeal of this assessment is based on true disagreement with the accurateness of the assessment of the delivery you gave on your assigned speaking day. You may not appeal in an attempt to secure a re-do of a poorly delivered or under-prepared speech delivery. The Course Director will review

the situation in its entirety, to include your written appeal, and make a determination if the situation warrants an opportunity to re-deliver the speech. If it is determined that the situation warrants a second opportunity to deliver the speech, you will be allowed to re-deliver your presentation to the COMM 286 Director and one outside instructor. You must use the same note cards, outline, and visual aid from your first presentation. An average of the scores you receive on the second presentation will replace your first score even if the second score is lower.

8. Beyond this procedure, it is within your right as a student to utilize the University's formal grade appeal process.

### **Communication Speech Lab**

The Communication Speech Lab (329 Burnett Hall) offers a variety of assistance for COMM 286 students: outlining help, delivery tips, managing communication apprehension, research strategies, etc. If you would like additional help in the course, please visit the lab during established hours (announced in class and is on Canvas).

### **Statement on Special Needs Accommodation**

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 participate fully 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, (402) 472-3787 voice or TTY.

### **Title IX**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same accountability and the same support applied to offenses against other protected categories; such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, UNL offers several resources for reporting and support (<http://www.unl.edu/equity/title-ix>). Located in Canfield Administration 128, Tami Strickman is UNL's Title IX coordinator. Her contact number is 402-472-3417. In the Student Union, Jan Deeds runs the Women's Center and is supervisor of PREVENT (the on campus student organization aimed toward sexual assault awareness and bystander intervention). Her contact information is [jdeeds1@unl.edu](mailto:jdeeds1@unl.edu), and 402-472-2598. Also located in the Student Union, Voices of Hope provides support in answering questions and guidance in reporting options. Please find the many resources offered by Voices of Hope at <http://involved.unl.edu/gender/advocate>. Additional support is offered through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) located in the University Health Center on the second floor. The contact number for CAPS is 402-472-7450.

### **Mission of the Department of Communication Studies**

The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-

face to digital media contexts. The department’s research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.

**Course Grading Scale**

A+ = 97-99.9%	B+ = 87-89.9%	C+ = 77-79.9%	D+ = 67-69.9%
A = 93-96.9%	B = 83-86.9%	C = 73-76.9%	D = 63-66.9%
A- = 90-92.9%	B- = 80-82.9%	C- = 70-72.9%	D- = 60-62.9%
			F = <60%

**My Grades” Student Grade Record**

(\* = Group Grade)

Assignment	Possible	My Score
Student Information Sheet	10	_____
<b>Total Quiz Score (6 @ 40 points, drop lowest score)</b>	<b>200</b>	_____
Quiz 1 _____		
Quiz 2 _____		
Quiz 3 _____		
Quiz 4 _____		
Quiz 5 _____		
Quiz 6 _____		
Impromptu Speech	30	_____
Individual Speech Outline	50	_____
Individual Speech	100	_____
Team Strategic Plan*	15*	_____
Critical Reflection Team Experience	30	_____
Team Professional Communication Consultan Presentatation*	100*	_____
Optional Extra Credit (max. 10 points)	--	_____
<b>TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS</b>	<b>535</b>	_____