

COMS 105 - COMMUNICATION IN SMALL GROUPS

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Office Hours: Tu/Th 2:45 – 4:15 p.m. (and by Appointment)

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CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION

Theory and practice in small group communication. Topics include leadership, meeting management, evolution of group norms, phases of group development, communication networks, good communication techniques, conflict management, and problem solving in a variety of contexts.

GENERAL COURSE OVERVIEW

ComS 105 is devoted to the study of communication in small groups. The course is designed to help you to understand principles of small group communication and to enhance your group communication skills. To achieve this goal:

- Students will form groups and work on projects related to group communication, which will be presented by all group members to the class.
- There will be **one (1) minor project, one (1) medium project, and one (1) major project** (which should be considered the highlight of the course).
- The major course project requires groups of students **to do something** (e.g., volunteer work, food/coat drive, organize activity, survey research, etc.) **and/or produce something** (e.g. video, manual, brochure, web materials, portfolio, etc.).
- The projects will also be used as the basis for individual assessments that evaluate and rate each of the group members' contributions and performances as well as the effectiveness of your overall small group communication (see special section on "Project Team Member Assessment Instrument").
- There will also be **one (1) mid-term and one (1) final exam**.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course you should be able to:

- understand and apply group communication theory.
- become aware of and recognize how communication in small groups is uniquely different from other forms of communication.
- understand and explain strategies to enhance your effectiveness in small groups.
- examine concepts such as group norms, roles, functions, leadership principles and group conflict management.
- practice problem-solving and decision-making skills to improve group performance and effectiveness.
- demonstrate creativity in group simulations and discussion.
- apply effective principles and practices for communicating to an audience.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS (BUNDLE)

Myers, S. & Anderson, C.(2008). The Fundamentals of Small Group Communication. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

SunWolf, Dr. (2008) Peer Groups: Expanding Our Study of Small Group Communication. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

SPECIFIC COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

- The course will follow a lecture-DISCUSSION-PARTICIPATION format, with a strong emphasis on discussion and participation. Accordingly, you are expected to **participate actively** in class and in group meetings.
- General **Attendance** is required as it is vital to the success of your group projects; therefore, absences and tardiness have consequences. **Two (2) unexcused absences** – either in class or out-of-class group meetings - will result in your final course grade being lowered by a half letter grade. If you have **three (3) unexcused absences**, your final grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. **In case of four (4) unexcused absences, you will fail the class**. Please note: leaving classes early is equivalent to being tardy; two times being tardy or leaving early will constitute one absence. Absences will be excused only with official documentation by law enforcement, court, physician, member of the clergy (to be presented at the next class), or university-sponsored events (with a coach or professor's note of explanation, well in advance). Therefore, please do not make appointments for the regularly scheduled class time.
- **Attendance on presentation days:** If you miss a class period - for any reason - where an assignment or presentation is due, you assume responsibility for the zero points that will be recorded. In other words, if you miss your individual group presentation day or a test, you will get zero points on that assignment.
- Be sure to **obtain e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of your group members** as soon as possible so that if you are absent, you can get class notes and announcements. It is your responsibility to learn if there have been any changes to the class schedule so that you can be sure you will be in attendance when your participation is crucial.
- **Grade disputes:** I will not discuss grades for any assignment on the day I hand it back to you, nor will I discuss individual grades in the classroom. All such discussions will take place only in my office at least one day after the grade has been received. If you wish to contest a grade, write out your argument concisely and bring it with you to the meeting.
- **Plagiarism:** In accordance with CSUS Faculty Senate ruling PM 04-01, academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and the Communication Studies Department's policies on plagiarism will be enforced. Any student proven guilty of plagiarism will receive an "F" in the course and be referred to the Dean of Students for further possible action. Plagiarism is the

use of somebody else's material as your own in a speech or paper without giving credit to the author. If you need additional information about plagiarism, consult the following URL: <http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353>

- “**Incompletes**” will not be given unless the requirements and conditions stipulated by the university are met. The grade of "I" (Incomplete) will be assigned only to students who have medical or other serious reasons, petition the instructor for this consideration, and have completed a substantial portion (over 50%) of the class assignments. You must also present, at the same time, a clear and coherent plan and time line for completion of the course.
- **Dropping** the class will require adherence to university policy. If you want to drop, be sure to do so before the end of the second week. Documentation of extenuating circumstances is required to drop after week two. Make your decision early if you are class-shopping.
- **Reasonable Accommodation Policy:** Please notify me as soon as possible if you have a learning disability that requires assistance or necessary academic accommodation, and provide the appropriate paperwork, so your needs can be accommodated in a timely manner.

And I almost forget to mention...

- **Cell Phones** will be turned off at the beginning of class and put away (***not vibrate, not silent, but off***) for the duration of the class period. The same goes for **Laptops, PDA's** and **MP3** players. There will be no laptops allowed in class for the purpose of taking notes or any other reason. This class is very participatory. There will only be little lecturing during class but mostly group activities and discussions, which require full attention and direct participation. Laptops will only be allowed for presentations at the discretion of your instructor. Non-compliance will result in being asked to leave the class (which counts as one absence!). **Repeated non-compliance will result in a grade reduction of your course grade for each subsequent offence.** Luckily for some, the lowest possible course grade remains “F” ☺!

Explanation of Assignments

- There will be three separate group projects throughout the course of the semester. My role as your instructor in this course will be that of **Program Manager**; students will work together in groups that are **Project Teams**.
- In addition to conducting classroom lectures, discussions, and group facilitation, I will oversee each of your projects and offer advice and guidance for improving product, task and relationship roles. I will provide dispute and/or conflict resolution should it become necessary.
- Each group will choose a **Project Manager** that reports to me regarding the group's project progress. To achieve a business-like atmosphere, we will run our classroom as if we were a consulting business whose mission it is to provide information about the course objectives to an outside source.
- Our organizational output (each of the three required presentations) is a training session related to our course objectives. To be successful in this course, you should plan to come to

class on time, minimize absences, and treat classroom projects as though they are very important to the success of our organization.

- Groups will be chosen for the first project very early in the semester so that we may begin work on the course projects. These groups may change for other projects depending on the recommendation of the Program Manager, Project Manager, or by request of a group member for transfer to another group. Group size will be limited to no more than seven (7) people.
- Group projects may follow one of the following formats for purposes of making a group presentation: Training Session, Symposium, Panel, or Forum. The group may also select an alternative format to present the group project. The only requirement for the choice of a format is that it is deemed to be the most effective format for the presentation of your group project. Learn more about these specific presentation formats in Appendix B of your textbook.
- Some course weeks will include group workshops to facilitate the development of the three projects you will present. During these workshops, conferences with each Project Team may be scheduled to check group progress and/or provide assistance with group issues. Such conferences will require the attendance of each group member. Groups not scheduled for a group conference may meet at an avenue of the group's choosing during the class period; however, it is up to you and your group to use this time wisely.
- ***Please note that it will also be necessary to meet outside of scheduled class time to develop outstanding presentations for each of the three assigned presentations.***

Specifics for Group Presentations

For each of the three assigned group project presentations you will be required to:

- Determine the appropriate way to present your group's project using the format chosen.
- Provide a full-sentence outline of the presentation to be handed in before the presentation is delivered.
- Provide at least five (5) oral citations from outside references in order to identify sources for the information being provided during the presentation.
- Use visual aids for each of the presentations, which must be directly related to the project objectives.
- Use creativity to enhance audience understanding and participation in learning the course objectives, concepts, skills, etc.
- Dress professionally as would befit a consultant visiting an organization to present concept information to organizational members.

Project Team Member Assessment Instrument

- Many people believe that group experiences are negative because one must sometimes do the work of others, and that those persons who do not work as hard are given the same grade as those who do work hard.

- To minimize this perception and the reality that it is sometimes true, each group member will rate the members of his/her Project Team for each group project by submitting an evaluation form that will be provided in class.
- Once the group members have been evaluated by each other, the evaluations will be quantified and each member of the group will receive an individual grade based partially on the evaluations of the other members of his/her group.
- Group members will not evaluate their own performance but only the performance of other group members as related to the project experience.
- The evaluation of each group member is quantified along three dimensions:
 - **Quality of Contribution** to Group Projects;
 - **Quantity of Contributions** to Group Projects;
 - **Contributions to Group Cohesion.**
- The evaluation form features a seven-point scale, ranging from low to high for each dimension. I will quantify each group member's score as assessed by other group members along each of these dimensions by averaging the scores for each dimension and then averaging the three scores together. These averaged scores will provide the basis for awarding individual points for group projects.
- This is how it works: Each project will be assessed for its value and a group score will be given to all group members for the project. In addition to this group score, individual points for each group member will be given based on his/her presentational skills (rated by me) as well as project performance rated by his/her peers. The person ranked the highest by other members of the group will receive all the points reserved for the individual performance for the group project.
- Thus, individual grades may vary for the project based on the evaluation of a group member by other group members. For example, for a project valued at 50 points, the whole group may receive 45 of the 50 possible points. Group members who are evaluated at the highest level (e.g., 7.0, 6.5, etc.) of the scale will receive all possible points for individual project performance. Group members who average lower evaluations from other group members will receive fewer points for the project depending on his/her individual rating score.
- In order to receive any grade for the group projects, each group member **must submit** an evaluation of other group members. Please turn in the evaluation form for each of the three projects on the same day your group presents the project (together with the project outline).

Student Evaluation and Point Distribution:

My evaluations are not "on a curve" and students in my classes do not compete with each other for grades; quality work for all assignments is the only objective and standard.

- In more than 25 years of teaching, I have probably given fewer "F" grades than CSUS average.
- Based on the idea of equality and fairness for all, no individual student will be allowed to do extra assignments to receive a better grade.
- The final grades will be given according to the following accumulated points received:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Participation | 50 Points |
| Group Project One (70/50/30) | 150 Points |
| Group Project Two (100/60/40) | 200 Points |
| Major Group Project (200/60/40) | 300 Points |
| Mid-Term (150) & Final Exam (150) | 300 Points |
| ----- | |
| <u>Total Points Possible:</u> | <u>1000 Points</u> |

Translation of Accumulated Points into Final Grades

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|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| A = 940+ | A- = 900-939 | B+ = 880-899 |
| B = 840-879 | B- = 800-839 | C+ = 780-799 |
| C = 740-779 | C- = 700-739 | D+ = 680-699 |
| D = 640-679 | D- = 600-639 | F = below 600 |

Grading Criteria for Assignments

Below is a general outline of how written and oral work will be assessed.

"F" is given for an assignment that fails to meet the mechanical or conceptual requirements of university work.

"D" is given for work which meets the requirements established (deadlines, mechanics etc.) but demonstrates serious flaws either in conceptual formation or mechanical limits.

"C" work is marked by timely completion of the assignment, demonstrating a solid grasp of the material. "C" work shows me that you understand the material under consideration. **"C" is the standard grade, and all assignments are constructed and selected with this in mind.**

"B" work is marked by a timely completion of the assignment, demonstrating not only a grasp of the material under consideration, but the ability to synthesize the material rather than simply repeat what you have learned. "B" represents an **effort, which is above average.**

"A" work constitutes superior handling of the mechanical and conceptual material covered in class, also show some originality of thought, a very high degree of clarity in expression, and an ability to contextualize ideas, explore implications, and/or raise meaningful questions. "A" serves as a reward for superior presentation of extremely diligent consideration given to conceptually complex work.

In short, "C" is good, "B" is better, and "A" is exceptional. Grades will be awarded according to this scale.

ComS-105 Course Schedule

(Tentative – Subject to Change)

Week 1 – Sep 03 & 05

Course Introduction and Orientation; Group Exercise
Components of Small Group Communication & Brainstorming for Major Project
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 1; PEER GROUPS: Chaps 1 & 2

Week 2 – Sep 10 & 12

Small Group Communication Theory & Group Socialization Process
Meet in Assigned Groups for Project 1; Get-to-know-each-other & Exercise
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 2; PEER GROUPS: Chaps 3 & 4

Week 3 – Sep 17 & 19

Group Introduction of Group Members to Whole Class
Personality Traits and Diversity among Small Group Members
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 3; PEER GROUPS: Chaps 5 & 6

Week 4 – Sep 24 & 26

Assignment of Project 1: Meet in Assigned Groups for Discussion
Sep 26: Meet in Assigned Groups for Project 1 Practice Run (**Out-of-Class**)
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 4

Week 5 – Oct 01 & 03

Formal Presentations of Group Project 1
Formal Presentations of Group Project 1
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 5

Week 6 – Oct 08 & 10

Small Group Formation, Development and Relating to Others
Small Group Tasks; **Formation of Groups for Projects 2 & 3**
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 6

Week 7 – Oct 15 & 17

Small Group Decision Making & **Assignment of Group Project 2**
Oct 17: Work on Group Project 2 (**Out-of-Class**)
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 7 & 8

Week 8 – Oct 22 & 24

Small Group Roles & **Assignment of Major Group Project (3)**
Oct 24: Mid-Term online Exam (**Out-of-Class**)
READ/REVIEW for Mid-Term: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 1-6 & Appendix B

Week 9 – Oct 29 & 31

Leadership and Relational Communication in Small Groups
Small Group Conflict Resolution & Group Climate/Cohesion
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 9 & 10

Week 10 – Nov 05 & 07

Work on Project Proposal & Agenda for Major Project Meeting
Nov 07: Practice-Session for Group Project 2 (Out-of-Class)
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Chap 11 & 12

Week 11 – Nov 12 & 14

! Formal Presentations of Group Project 2 !
! Formal Presentations of Group Project 2 !
READ: FUNDAMENTALS: Appendix A

Week 12 – Nov 19 & 21

Nov 19: Major Project Meeting: Groups 1 & 2 (In class)
Groups 3 & 4: Observe Meeting (In Class)
Groups 5 & 6: Discuss Major Project (Out-of-Class)

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Nov 21: Major Project Meeting: Groups 3 & 4 (In class)
Groups 5 & 6: Observe Meeting (In Class)
Groups 1 & 2: Discuss Major Project (Out-of-Class)

Week 13 – Nov 26 & 28 (Thanksgiving)

Nov 26: Major Project Meeting: Groups 5 & 6 (In class)
Groups 1 & 2: Observe Meeting (In Class)
Groups 3 & 4: Discuss Major Project (Out-of-Class)

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Nov 28: Thanksgiving – Enjoy your Family & Turkey!

Week 14 – Dec 03 & 05

! Group Presentations of Major Project !
! Group Presentations of Major Project !

Week 15 – Dec 10 & 12

! Group Presentations of Major Project !
Last Class: Review of Course (All Course Material)

Week 16 – Finals' Week (Final online-Exam Dec 17 or 19)