

## Small Group Communication (COM 355)

**Instructor:** Dan Hanson

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**Office Hours:** Wednesday 10:00 – Noon, WEC hours: Sat 7:00-8:00 AM, Noon – 1:00 and 5:00-5:30 PM

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**Classroom:** Please refer to Records & Registration on the Inside Augsburg page (<http://augnet.augsburg.edu>) for the latest information on room assignments for your class.

### **Required Text:**

*Communicating in Small Groups*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed, by Stephen Beebe & John Masterson

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course gives you an opportunity to learn about small group communication through theory and practice. You apply theories and tools to actual group experiences. At the beginning of the term you form small groups of 5 to 6 members. You work with your group throughout the term and apply material from lectures and class discussion around current small group theories.

This course is based on the precepts of experiential learning where you learn by doing. Small groups require a commitment from you with regard to time and energy. Whenever possible your groups will be given time in class for group meetings. However, this course requires that you meet as a group outside of class as well. How much time spent outside of class will depend on your group's efficiency and work style. **Your small group projects will account for half of your final grade. Therefore, attendance is essential.** If you know that you will miss classes during the term it is better that you register for this class another time.

It is important to mention that this course can be stressful at times since working in groups is not always easy. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your group throughout the term (at the group's request) in order to help facilitate when and if the group does not feel capable of resolving group issues. It is my hope that your group will make all attempts to negotiate your differences on your own before seeking my input.

### **Individual Work**

#### **Journals (150 points)**

Three journals are assigned worth 50 points each. Due dates are included in the class schedule attached. Each journal is 3 to 4 pages long. Topics for journals are assigned based on lecture and reading material as noted in the class schedule. The purpose of the journal is to give you the opportunity to show that you 1) understand the lecture concepts and are able to define them and 2) that you are able to use the concepts to analyze your actual group experiences in this course. The first 2-3 paragraphs of the journal are a

definition of the assigned concepts in your own words. The remainder of the journal is your detailed and specific application of those concepts to your group experiences. Late journals are not accepted for full credit unless approved by the instructor.

### **Exam (350 points)**

There is one exam during the term. The exam consists of two parts. Part one is a list of concepts taken from lectures and readings. You select five of the concepts and define them in detail (minimum of 1-2 paragraphs per definition) followed by an example taken from your small group experience demonstrating how the concept plays out in everyday life. Part two of the exam is a long essay question. You choose one of two questions to write on. You define the terms that appear in the question and apply them to your small group experiences. A study guide for the exam is provided in class.

### **Group Work**

#### **Panel Presentation (250 points)**

Each group **prepares a panel presentation** that is presented to the class. Early in the term each group selects a contemporary and controversial topic. The group researches the topic and **prepares a manuscript outline**. Instructions for completing the outline are distributed in class. Outlines are typed with complete bibliographies, footnotes, etc. Each group turns in one outline for the entire group. All group members receive the same grade. This is a group project and it is expected that the group work together on the outline with every member contributing. Each member needs to understand all of the content in order to participate in the panel discussion. Your group is given 45 minutes to present your panel, 30 minutes devoted to the panel and 15 minutes devoted to a forum afterwards to give the audience an opportunity to ask questions about your findings.

#### **Case Study (250 points)**

Following the panel presentations, members of the group engage in a discussion of their group experience – how leadership emerged (or didn't), how conflicts were resolved (or not resolved), group norm development, group fantasies, etc. In other words, you analyze your group's behavior. When the group has a good grasp of what happened within your group and why, the group **creates a skit or series of skits** to illustrate what it was like to be a member of your group. The skits should be as creative as possible. You may use props, costumes – whatever works for your group and is fun. Finally, the group **writes a 10 to 12 page paper** using course theory to explain your group experience. This case study paper should be an in-depth analysis of your group with regard to important dimensions of small group theory. It is essential that all members contribute to the paper. The paper should be typed and double-spaced.

#### **Late Papers**

Group papers must be turned in on time. There are no incompletes. If you are struggling with any of the assignments, please see me. I am here to help you learn.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance in this class is essential. The members of your group are counting on you. Unexcused absence will effect your final grade.

**Grading**

Grading is based on a simple percentage system (950-1000 points = 4.0, 900-949 = 3.5, 850-899 = 3.0, 800-849 = 2.5, 750-799 = 2.0). However, attendance and class participation are also considered in determining your final grade. I will consider using a curve based on overall class performance.

## **SMALL GROUP PROJECT OUTLINE AND PANEL PRESENTATION**

Write the outline in complete sentences with one sentence per heading or sub-heading. Outlines should be a minimum of **12 pages** long. Follow the standard outline format (e.g. I, A, 1, a). Once your group has selected a topic you should develop a question of policy. This question becomes the title of your outline and of your panel presentation. The question begins with the word “should.” For example, “Should the U.S. have a National Health Care Policy?” Make the question specific. Once you have chosen a question, the group researches the question. The research includes library resources, Internet searches, interviews, etc. You must use more than one source. The group pools its research and writes an outline using the following format.

### **Question of policy**

- I. Background of the topic (use a complete sentence)**
  - A. History of the issue**
    - 1.
    - 2.
  - B. Scope of the issue (who’s impacted by this issue?)**
    - 1.
    - 2.
  - C. Seriousness of the issue (life or death?)**
    - 1.
    - 2.
  - D. Limitations of the issue (how has the group decided to limit the focus?)**
    - 1.
    - 2.
- II. Definitions of terms (names, acronyms, scientific terms, etc.)**
- III. Criteria used in selecting the best solution (minimum of three)**
  - A. Any solution should (or should not).....**
  - B. Any solution....**
  - C. Any solution.....**
- IV. Alternative solution #1**
  - A. Description of solution**
  - B. Advantages of solution**
  - C. Disadvantages of solution**

- V. **Alternative #2 (same as above)**
- VI. **Alternative #3**
- VII. **Best solution**
  - A. **Description of the alternative solution the group chose as the best solution**
  - B. **Advantages of the chosen solution (apply the criteria from step III and include which criteria are met by this solution)**
  - C. **Disadvantages of the chosen solution (apply criteria again and discuss which are *not* met by this solution)**
- VIII. **Implementation of the best solution (include the steps necessary to carry out your solution. Be as detailed and specific as possible)**
- IX. **Bibliography (include all research sources including interviews and surveys)**

**NOTE: IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES THROUGHOUT THE OUTLINE BY USING FOOTNOTES OR ENDNOTES.**

**Panel Presentation:**

Each group selects a moderator. The moderator's responsibilities include:

1. Introduce the question of policy
2. Introduce the members of the group
3. Initiate the discussion
4. Keep track of time
5. Lead the discussion so that all the material is covered
6. Provide clarification when appropriate
7. Summarize

The moderator also facilitates the question and answer forum following the presentation. S/He calls on members of the audience who have questions and directs the questions to the appropriate group member.

The presentations last 30 to 40 minutes followed by 10 to 15 minutes of questions and answers. Groups may use their outline and notes

during the presentation. Avoid reading the notes. All members must contribute to the discussion. Plan adequate rehearsal time so that the presentation flows naturally. Talk with each other, not the audience. The moderator addresses the audience only during the intro and conclusion. The panel is seated in a semi-circle in front of the class with the moderator in the middle. Use name cards to identify each member. Believe it or not this can be fun!!

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Session 1: Introductions, Course overview, lecture-dialog on small group principles and theory. Read Beebe & Masterson Part I (chapters 1–3).

Session 2: Lecture-dialog on decision-making, group climate and leadership. **Journals due** on groups as systems. Read chapters 4-6 and chapters 8-10 and chapter 12 in Beebe & Masterson.

Session 3: Lecture-dialog on group creativity and conflict management. **Journals due** on decision-making, group climate, and leadership. Read chapters 7 and 11 in Beebe & Masterson.

Session 4: Dialog on Groups and teams and principles and practices for effective meetings. Groups meet to rehearse panel presentations. **Journals due** on group creativity and conflict management. Read appendix A in Beebe & Masterson. Groups meet to plan panel presentations

Session 5: **Group outlines due; Panel presentations!** Groups meet to prepare panel presentations.

Session 6: **Case study presentation-skit. Case study papers due** Dialog on Diversity in Groups; General review. Groups meet to plan case study presentations/skits.

Session 7: Final comments and insights; **Final Exam**