

Comm 5: Fall 2018

Group Discussion and Problem-Solving

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or by appointment

Course Description

Experiential study of small-group discussion, including problem solving, conflict resolution, group roles, leadership styles, interest-based negotiating, group-meeting protocols, organizational communication, and cultural diversity.

Grading Philosophy

You are not competing against other students. As the instructor, I do not compare students with each other, and I ask that you not judge yourself in comparison to your classmates or other small groups. My task is to assist each student with listening, being heard and accomplishing goals in a group setting. Your tasks are to develop your voice as a tool of collaboration and to listen to the voices of others. It is likely you will learn more from your classmates than from your instructor or textbook, and even more likely that your instructor will learn more from you than vice versa. (*For more on Grading, see pages 3-4 below.*)

Textbook & Readings

Adams, Katherine L. and Gloria J. Galanes. *Communicating in Groups. Applications and Skills*. McGraw Hill, 2017. (10th edition)

Library Reserve Call Number: HM736 .G33 2018

Bring the call number along with your SRJC Student ID card to the Library Reserve desk when you are ready to check out material. Additional readings and links to web resources may be provided during semester.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1. Employ a systematic method within a group to solve a problem.**
- 2. Communicate effectively within groups.**
- 3. Observe and explain effective group processes.**

Course Objectives (link to [Course Outline of Record](#))

1. Describe, compare, and analyze a variety of **small-group communication behaviors**.
2. Choose and practice methods for communicating with other members of a small group.
3. Describe, compare and analyze some **culturally-based differences** in cognitive styles and world-views of group members.
4. Describe and practice **supportive communication** behaviors.
5. Discuss and practice **listening skills** related to small-group communication.
6. Discuss and practice communication skills related to **leadership** and **decision-making**.
7. Demonstrate an appreciation for the **sociological and behavioral differences** between people, various cultures, personality types and learning styles.
8. Strategize and practice **problem-solving methods** for individual and group.
9. Discuss and practice both **task and maintenance roles** and behaviors.
10. Discuss and practice methods of group **consensus building**, rather than less inclusive means of decision-making, such as majority vote or trading.
11. Define, discuss, identify and **avoid groupthink**.
12. Create a **meeting agenda** to lead a group meeting utilizing Parliamentary Procedure.
13. Observe and explain concepts of organizational communication; organizational culture.
14. Explain and practice **methods of effective leadership** in a variety of situations.

Participation & Attendance

This section emphasizes experiential learning of group communication through real-time, face-to-face interactions, group discussions and class activities. Participation is essential. Therefore, students are expected to

- Attend every class meeting.
- Be "present" (awake, alert and engaged) during class.
- Be open to communicating with the instructor.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. When credit is earned for learning through experiences, one must be present to learn/earn. Credit for missed class activities cannot be made up. College policy 8.1.5 stipulates that students missing more than 10% of total class hours are subject to being dropped from the class. For this class, 10% = 280 minutes. If you do miss more than 10% of total class hours, your semester grade may drop by 10%.

If you need to miss more than one class in a row, contact instructor ahead of time to avoid being dropped.

Late work: Written assignments will be accepted up to one week after the due date. Being late with oral assignments disrupts the course for your classmates and is not permitted. Missing an oral assignment will result in a grade of 0-zero for the absent student. The rest of the group is expected to perform without the missing member. Missing oral evaluations of your own and other groups will also result in a grade of 0-zero.

Course Assignments

Specific guidelines and grading criteria for each assignment will be provided in class as we go along. Assignments are weighted as follows:

25% Group Projects:

- 5% Creative Collaboration in a Small Group
- 10% Systematic Problem-Solving in a Small Group
- 10% Dynamic Governance among Small Groups

10% Group Presentations:

- 5% Group Identity as Visual Symbol (Logo, Brand, Coat of Arms)
- 5% Problem-Solution Proposal with Implementation Plan

15% Group Meetings:

- 10% Formal meeting protocol (with written agenda and meeting notes)
- 5% Informal working discussions (with meeting notes)

10% Field Research on Existing External Group

Weekly field observation notes & analysis of an existing external group

15% Evaluation of Groups in Action:

- 10% Written Reflection/Self Evaluation as a group participant
- 5% Written and Oral Analysis and Evaluation of classmates' group process

10% Experiential Learning Activities

Games, group exercises & problem-solving simulations

15% Tests:

- 5% Quizzes on weekly assigned reading
- 10% Final Exam (will emphasize dynamic governance, distributive leadership)

Grading

Assignments are weighted "High Stakes/High Steps" (10%) and "Low Stakes/Low Steps" (5%). Assignments are assessed as follows:

- + takes a risk (raises semester grade a step)
- ✓ satisfies guidelines (maintains semester grade at same level)
- △ area for growth and improvement (grade pending future assignments)
- does not fulfill basic guidelines (drops semester grade a step)
- 0 assignment not attempted (drops semester grade 3 steps)

Students begin the semester at the level of B minus (80%). It requires "plus" grades on 3 "High Stakes" or 6 "Low Stakes" assignments to raise semester grade a full letter (i.e., B to A). "Minus" grades cancel out "plus" grades and reverse upward progress.

A "Zero 0" grade, as its shape suggests, opens a black hole in the Holistic Learning Universe, potentially sucking the student into oblivion. More concretely, ***not attempting an assignment lowers semester grade by 3 steps.***

Grading (continued)

Taking Risks: Risks may be creative, intellectual, emotional or social-interactive. The following explanations are by no means exhaustive, and students are encouraged to think outside the box and/or stretch beyond your comfort zones.

- **Creative risks** could involve multi-sensory, multicultural, or multiple intelligences approaches to group activities; considering multiple perspectives in research, proposal development, and implementation planning; or an innovative approach to a topic/issue.
- **Intellectual risks** could involve choosing cutting edge, controversial, or fringe issues and topics that challenge both student and classmates to consider new ideas, re-consider deeply held beliefs, or question our biases; or challenging the status quo; or playing devil's advocate on popular ideas; calling attention to group think, or confirmation bias.
- **Emotional risks** could involve making authentic connections with fellow group members; offering honest supportive feedback on group social behaviors, or being open and honest about personal values and vision.
- **Interactive risks** could involve proactively engaging with group-mates and classmates; inviting our participation in your group's creative collaborations, problem-solving methods, and dynamic governance processes.

Class Participation: This course emphasizes experiential learning of oral communication through face-to-face interaction, group discussions and class activities. Missing class lowers your grade. ***Missing no class time raises semester grade a "Low Stakes Plus Step."***

Cell Phone Activity in Classroom

This section focuses on face-to-face, real-time oral communication. More than simply speaking, communication entails listening, attention to body language and nonverbal messages, and awareness of group energy and dynamics. Cell phones offer effective tools, but cell phone activity unrelated to course exercises and group needs interferes with the focus of this course. Please limit use of your cell phone inside classroom. In general . . .

Sound Off ✧ Vibrate Off ✧ Signal Off Out of Reach ✧ Out of Sight ✧ Out of Mind

Expectations

This section emphasizes experiential learning of face-to-face, real-time group communication. Participation is essential. Therefore, students are expected to

- Attend every class meeting.
- Be "present" (awake, alert and engaged) during class.
- Be open to communicating with the instructor.

Electronic messages are useful for sharing information. Face-to-face communication tends to work better when discussing personal concerns. Students are invited to speak informally with the instructor after class as needed and/or to schedule appointments during office hours for private or sensitive matters. If you have a concern that you are uncomfortable talking about with me directly, contact our Department Chair at 527-4238.

Academic Honesty & Student Conduct

Honesty and integrity are encouraged in this course and among the relationships that develop in this classroom. To paraphrase author and radio host Caroline Casey in her interpretation of philosopher George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff:

Knowledge tends to degrade from one generation to the next, especially when we take on somebody else's original work without doing our own. A Tibetan saying goes, "Knowledge must be burned, hammered, and beaten like gold. Then, one can wear it like an ornament." When we passively, hence uncritically, receive teaching of any kind, our learning is degraded and our grade is merely fool's gold.

College Policy 3.11 states: "Academic dishonesty is regarded as any act of deception, benign or malicious in nature, in the completion of any academic exercise. Examples of academic dishonesty include cheating, plagiarism, collusion or other academic misconduct." Please be familiar with these definitions ([Academic Honesty Definitions & Misconduct](#)).

All students are expected to know the [Student Conduct Code](#) and adhere to it in this class.

Disability Accommodations and Student Health

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you need disability-related accommodations for this class, such as a note taker, test taking services, special furniture, etc., please provide the Authorization for Academic Accommodations (AAA letter) from the Disability Resources Department (DRD) to the instructor as soon as possible. You may also speak with the instructor privately during office hours about your accommodations. If you have not received authorization from DRD, it is recommended that you contact them directly. DRD is located in Bertolini (3rd Floor, Room 4842) on the Santa Rosa campus, and Jacobs Hall (Room 101) on the Petaluma Campus.

Health & Learning: Health issues (physical and mental) can interfere with academic success. Student Health Services is here to support you. Details are available at shs.santarosa.edu.

Emergency Plan

Emergency Evacuation Plan: In the event of an emergency during class that requires evacuation of the building, please leave the class immediately and calmly. To make sure everyone got out of the building safely and to receive further instructions, our class will meet at the following location:

► ***In the north lot outside the classroom building***

If you are a student with a disability who may need assistance in an evacuation, please see instructor during office hours as soon as possible to discuss an evacuation plan.