

COMM 349: Group Decision Making Spring 2008

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Whereas individual achievement was once the hallmark of personal success, we now live in an era in which success often depends on your ability to work in groups." (Engleberg & Wynn, 2007)

Small group communication is generally defined as the interaction of three or more people working together to achieve a common goal. The purpose of a group decision making course is to study the group process including group dynamics, interaction, and communication in small group situations. This course focuses on secondary groups such as committees, task forces, quality circles, work groups, activity groups, boards, and teams. Specifically, this course provides both information and application of group decision making theories and processes. Students will have the opportunity to learn and practice a variety of skills including research, organization, creative thinking, critical thinking, leadership, problem solving/decision making, analysis of group processes, and conflict management.*

Course readings, lectures, discussions, and assignments are designed to enhance students' overall competency when participating in small group and team communication. Students will engage in a number of group activities including a service learning project involving a local nonprofit organization. The knowledge gained about groups and multiple group experiences are intended to help students become both more comfortable and more competent participants in a variety of small group contexts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The goals of this course are the following:

1. To examine the principles and practices of small group communication and decision making.
2. To develop skills in understanding, analyzing, and evaluating small group communication.
3. To practice problem-solving and decision making techniques in group and team situations.
4. To enhance interpersonal skills in small group contexts.
5. To improve small group presentation skills.
6. To engage in a service learning project where classroom theories and skills can be put to work to benefit both the student and a community organization.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- Textbook:
Adams, K., & Galanes, G. J. (2006). *Communicating in groups: Applications and skills* (6th ed.).
New York: McGraw-Hill. (ISBN-0073042595)
- Clicker
- An active email account registered on TopNet and accessed through Blackboard
- Scantron forms #882-ES (teal green) for each exam

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I believe that a teacher's responsibility is not to prepare the path for the child, but to prepare the child for the path. Today's students will embark on numerous life and career paths, none of which can be mapped or predicted in a world where perhaps the only constant is change. Success that was once ensured by the mastery of a set body of knowledge now rests upon one's ability to continuously learn and relearn the skills required for increasingly diverse, changing, and challenging environments. As such, my goal as a teacher is not merely to impart content knowledge, but to construct an engaging learning environment in which students can enhance their critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and presentational skills.

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Class Attendance. You are expected to attend every class. It takes time and shared experiences for a group/team to be successful in working together. Consequently, it is important that you be present to participate in class discussions and group activities.

You are allowed three unexcused absences before points are deducted. **Your final semester grade will be reduced 2 percentage points for each unexcused absence over three.** For example, if your final grade was a 90, and you had 4 unexcused absences, your final grade would be reduced to an 88.

Absences may be excused for the following reasons:

- illness of student or serious illness of an immediate family member
- death of an immediate family member
- required participation in an official university function (e.g., class trip, intercollegiate athletic events).

For any absence to be excused, students must complete the Excused Absence Request Form found under Course Information on Blackboard. This form should be submitted prior to the absence when possible and no later than the first class meeting of your return—no exceptions. The appropriate written documentation must be attached. Documentation of university-sponsored events must be submitted 1 week prior to the absence. Failure to provide the request form and written documentation in a timely manner will automatically result in an unexcused absence.

In addition, any student missing more than 1/3 of the class (10 class meetings) will NOT pass the course regardless of graded assignments.

Arriving Late/Leaving Early. You are expected to be on time for class. Attendance is defined as being present no later than 5 minutes after the start of class and includes being present until the end of the class session. Tardiness will be considered an absence if you are not present when attendance is taken—again, no exceptions. Leaving early will also be considered an absence if you have not gained prior approval.

Make-up Work. Make-up work is only allowed for excused absences. It is your responsibility to contact me regarding any missed work. Make-up work is due the day you return to class. Additionally, it is the student's responsibility to obtain any class notes, handouts, and other missed information from a classmate.

Assignment Due Dates. Deadlines are imposed to allow a reasonable amount of time to complete assignments and to give and receive feedback in a timely manner. Assignments may be turned in any time before the due date and must be turned in at the beginning of the class meeting in which they are due. It is not acceptable to miss class and email your assignment. Late papers will NOT be accepted unless other arrangements have been made due to an excused absence. Oral presentations and in-class activities cannot be made up.

In the event that the University cancels classes, such as for severe weather, you are expected to continue with readings as originally scheduled. Any assignments scheduled during those missed classes, such as an exam or paper, are due at the next class meeting unless you receive other instructions.

Written Assignment Guidelines. All assignments prepared outside of class must be typewritten and submitted in hard copy. They should be in a standard format including 12 point font, double spacing, and 1 inch margins. In the case of multiple pages, the paper must be stapled.

Participation. A collaborative learning environment will be both more interesting and beneficial for everyone. Therefore, you are expected to participate fully in the course. This includes reading assigned materials before class, contributing to class and group discussions, and participating in group activities.

Class Environment. In order to build an open, professional classroom atmosphere everyone should follow certain ground rules. These rules of civility include but are not limited to:

1. Displaying respect for all members of the classroom community, both your instructor and fellow students.
2. Paying attention to and participating in lectures, group activities, presentations, and other classroom exercises.
3. Avoiding unnecessary disruptions during class such as ringing cell phones (turn them off before class), text messaging, having private conversations, reading newspapers, and doing work for other classes.
4. Avoiding racist, sexist, homophobic, or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom community.

Cell Phone and Other Electronics. The standard departmental policy regarding cell phones is as follows:

Cell phones shall not be used for any purpose during class time. Any student with a cell phone in hand or on his or her desk during class time will be asked to leave class and will be counted absent for that day. This policy applies during student presentations as well as during lecture and discussion. Any student using a cell phone during an exam will receive a zero on that exam and may be subject to other university discipline.

Use of laptop computers will not be allowed in class without prior permission from the professor. Any student seeking permission should make an appointment with me outside of class time.

Group/Team Meeting Attendance. In order for you to get the most out of your group experience and for you to be a contributing group member, you must attend and participate in all group meetings and activities, both in and out of class. **If a student misses 30% or more of his/her team's meetings, he/she will be "fired" from the group and will receive a failing grade for the course.** To avoid any misunderstandings about meetings, students must provide their group members with multiple ways in which they can be reached (e.g., email, voice mail, phone). If a member must miss a meeting, that member should inform other members of the group, provide a reason for his/her absence, and provide any materials for which the member is responsible for that meeting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course requirements include a combination of assignments to be completed as an individual and as a group. The majority of your individual points will come from chapter quizzes and exams, while the majority of your group points will come from a major service learning project.

Chapter Quizzes. Ten chapter quizzes will be made available online via Blackboard. They are to be completed prior to the first class period in which the respective chapter is introduced.

Examinations. Three examinations will be comprised of multiple choice and short answer questions. Chapters covered are listed on the course schedule. The final examination will be comprehensive with approximately 50% of the points coming from chapters previously covered and the remaining 50% of the points focusing on new material.

Group/Service Learning Project. Early in the semester, you will be assigned to a group of 4-5 members. Each group will work with a local nonprofit organization (NPO) and assist them in identifying, analyzing, and solving an organizational problem. The project will culminate in a written report provided to the organization and an oral presentation given to organizational leaders and classmates. Further project details will be given in class.

Group Presentation of Teambuilding Activity. Your group will present a teambuilding activity to the class with the goal of increasing the cohesiveness among each group's members. The activity may be original (created by your group) or may come from other sources based upon research (in which case you need to provide the source).

Collaborative Film Analysis. After viewing a designated film, group members will work together to analyze the film by applying course concepts. Questions will be provided to guide your analysis and written report.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Individual Assignments	Points Possible	Your Score
Chapter Quizzes (10 x 10 pts. each)	100	
Exams (3 x 100 pts. each)	300	
Service Learning Project Reflection	50	
Homework Assignments	30	
Group Assignments		
Group Homework Assignments	20	
Group Presentation of a Teambuilding Activity	50	
Collaborative Film Analysis	100	
Group Service Learning Project		
• Agendas and Minutes of Group Meetings	50	
• Written Report	100	
• List of references	50	
• Oral Presentation	100	
• Peer Evaluations	50	
TOTAL	1000	

Grade Distribution (in Points Earned)

- A = 900-1000
- B = 800-899
- C = 700-799
- D = 600-699
- F = below 599

A FEW NOTES ABOUT GRADES:

- Grades are reflections of the merit of a student's performance. Work that meets the minimum requirements of the assignment will earn an average grade of "C." To receive a higher grade, you must exceed the minimum requirements by demonstrating creativity and understanding of the material that goes above and beyond the norm.
- Final grades will be distributed according to the point scale listed above. Do not expect final grades to be curved, and do not ask to be awarded those couple of extra points needed to reach the next letter grade. Remember throughout the semester that every point counts!
- It is your responsibility to keep up with your point totals. If at any time you have a question about a grade, it should be addressed within one week of receiving the grade. Grades will not be reassessed or changed after that time period. In other words, do not wait until the end of the semester to look at or question the points you have earned.

- Grades will not be provided to students via e-mail.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Western Kentucky University maintains a “zero tolerance” policy on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. As a student at Western Kentucky University, you are expected to demonstrate academic integrity, as outlined in the University Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities (WKU Catalog, 260) in all coursework. Violations of this code of conduct include but are not limited to cheating (by giving or receiving unauthorized information before or during an exam or assignment), dishonesty (including misrepresentation and/or lying), and plagiarism.

I expect that all of the assignments you complete are always your own work. However, many students are not sure exactly what “your own work” means, so, please read again the information on plagiarism and cheating from your student handbook. Aside from copying work, plagiarism includes incorrectly citing sources or presenting someone’s information as your own, without crediting the source. To avoid this, you should carefully make notes to keep track of where your information came from. In written form, you must use quotation marks when referring to another’s work. In a speech where you are paraphrasing, you can say “According to ... (give name)...” It does not take much effort to make sure you follow the rules for using another’s thoughts.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE for telling your audience or reader whether you are:

1. directly quoting from a source
2. paraphrasing closely from a source, which means using significant portions of another source’s sentences or language
3. using the ideas advanced by a different source

Penalty for Academic Dishonesty. Western Kentucky University and the Department of Communication are committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on an exam, or purchasing papers, speeches, or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade on the assignment and in the course, and will be reported for disciplinary action. Falsified medical excuses and presenting another student’s work as your own fall within the guidelines of this academic integrity policy. As you can see, these are extreme measures for academic offenses that we believe are serious. If you have any questions about whether you may be plagiarizing in your work, please be sure to contact me well in advance of the due date for your assignment.

Note: Sharing exam information or taking an exam from the classroom (where applicable) will also be considered cheating. All exams remain the property of the professor.

STUDENT SERVICES

Students With Disabilities

In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services in DUC A-200 of the Student Success Center in Downing University Center. The phone number is 745-5004. Please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

The Learning Center (TLC) (located in the Academic Advising and Retention Center, DUC-A330)

Should you require academic assistance with this course, or any other course, there are several places that can provide you with help. TLC tutors in most major undergraduate subjects and course levels throughout the week. To make an appointment, or to request a tutor for a specific class, call 745-6254 or stop by DUC A330. Log on to TLC’s website at www.wku.edu/tlc <<http://www.wku.edu/tlc>> to find out more. TLC hours: M-Thur. 8am-9pm, Fri. 8am-4pm, Sat.-Closed, and Sundays 4pm-9pm.

NOTE: The procedures and schedule in this course are subject to change as needed.

** Parts of this syllabus have been borrowed and/or adapted from former COMM 349 instructor, Mr. Gary Hughes.*

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change as necessary)

Date	Class Topic	Bring to Class/Assignment Due	Readings
Wednesday 1/23	Introduction to Course		
Friday 1/25	Clickers Pre-test	Clickers (TODAY AND EVERYDAY) Information Sheet	
Monday 1/28	Small Groups as the Heart of Society		Chapter 1
Wednesday 1/30	Small Groups as the Heart of Society		Chapter 1
Friday 2/1	Small Groups as Systems		Chapter 2
Monday 2/4	Small Groups as Systems		Chapter 2
Wednesday 2/6	Communication Principles for Group Members		Chapter 3
Friday 2/8	Communication Principles for Group Members		Chapter 3
Monday 2/11	Service learning project and group assignments		
Wednesday 2/13	Verbal and Nonverbal Messages		Chapter 4
Friday 2/15	Verbal and Nonverbal Messages		Chapter 4
Monday 2/18	Exam 1 – Chapters 1 – 4	Scantron Sheet	
Wednesday 2/20	Review Exam In-class Group Meetings		
Friday 2/22	Meyers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator	MBTI (10 pts.)	
Monday 2/25	Creative and Critical Thinking		Chapter 5
Wednesday 2/27	Creative and Critical Thinking		Chapter 5
Friday 2/29	Creative and Critical Thinking	Informational Interview Report (10 pts.)	Chapter 5
Monday 3/3	Film		
Wednesday 3/5	Film		
Friday 3/7	In-class Group Meetings	Agendas and minutes of first 3 group meetings (10 pts.)	
3/10-3/14	NO CLASS – Spring Break		

Monday 3/17	Group Problem Solving		Chapter 6
Wednesday 3/19	Group Problem Solving		Chapter 6
Friday 3/21	Becoming a Group	Collaborative Film Analysis (100 pts.)	Chapter 7
Monday 3/24	Becoming a Group Teambuilding Activities	Group Presentations of Teambuilding Activities (50 pts.)	Chapter 7
Wednesday 3/26	Teambuilding Activities	Group Presentations of Teambuilding Activities (50 pts.)	
Friday 3/28	Celebrating Diversity		Chapter 8
Monday 3/31	Exam 2 – Chapters 5 – 8	Scantron Sheet	
Wednesday 4/2	Review Exam In-class Group Meetings	Volunteer Time Forms (documenting 10 hours completed)	
Friday 4/4	Out-of-class Group Meetings		
Monday 4/7	Managing Conflicts	Conflict Style Inventory (10 pts.)	Chapter 9
Wednesday 4/9	Leadership Principles		Chapter 10
Friday 4/11	Leadership Principles		Chapter 10
Monday 4/14	Giving Group Oral Presentations		Chapter 11
Wednesday 4/16	In-class Group Meetings		
Friday 4/18	In-class Group Meetings		
Monday 4/21	Group Presentations	Service Learning Project	
Wednesday 4/23	Group Presentations	Service Learning Project	
Friday 4/25	Group Presentations	Service Learning Project	
Monday 4/28	Group Presentations	Service Learning Project	
Wednesday 4/30	Group Presentations	Service Learning Project	

Friday 5/2	Exam Review and Semester Wrap Up	Service Learning Project Reflection	
Tuesday 5/6	FINAL EXAM – Comprehensive 10:20 class	Scantron Sheet 10:30 am – 12:30 pm	
Thursday 5/8	11:30 class	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	