

CMS 330 Small Group Communication

Spring, 2012

Dr. Lawrence A. Hosman

Office: 478 Liberal Arts Building

Office phone: 266-4271

Office hours: 9:00-10:00 MWF, 9:30-11:00 T, and by appointment. I don't mind drop-ins.

E-mail: Lawrence.Hosman@usm.edu (this is the most reliable way to contact me)

Personal Web-page: <http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~w305727/>

"People can be motivated to be good not by telling them that hell is a place where they will burn, but by telling them it is an unending committee meeting. On judgment day, the Lord will divide people by telling those on His right hand to enter His kingdom and those on His left to break into small groups." (Rev. Robert Kennedy, cited in Galanes and Brillhart, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 1991).

The purpose of this course is to acquaint you with some of the practical concerns, as well as the theoretical ones, involved in group decision-making. Essentially, the course deals with that area of small group communication that involves problem solving and decision-making. During the first weeks of the course, you will be exposed to the foundations of group decision-making. Once the foundation is laid, the course will emphasize theoretical concerns--areas in which groups, including those consisting of responsible members, make inaccurate decisions and areas in which people successfully employ the decision-making process in pursuit of reasonable solutions. Throughout, you will be provided with opportunities for putting into practice the skills you acquire. Hopefully, by the end of the course, you will not only be acquainted with small group dynamics, but additionally you will have acquired skills in upholding the rational aspects of decision-making, for it is in the group, as well as among individuals, that decisions are made which affect the quality of our lives--on local, state, and national levels. And hopefully, you will see that the quotation from Reverend Kennedy is not necessarily true.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course students should be able minimally to do the following: (1) identify the skills necessary to be a competent small group member and communicator; (2) identify the characteristics of defective decision-making and problem-solving; (3) identify the characteristics of effective decision-making and problem-solving; (4) think critically in a small group and identify weaknesses in other group members' thinking; (5) identify the stages of group development; (6) identify what a cooperative group environment is and how it can be developed through communication; (7) identify the types of healthy and unhealthy roles that emerge in groups; (8) identify the characteristics of effective group leadership; (9) identify the nature and function of power in groups; (10) identify how power is related to group conflict; (11) identify how conflict can be managed in groups through communication; and (12) apply objectives 1-11 in actual small group decision-making discussions.

COURSE TEXTBOOK

Rothwell, J. D. (2007). *In Mixed Company: Communicating in Small Groups and Teams* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Everyone will be required to take 3 examinations over material covered in class and in the text. Each exam will count for 20% of your final grade (100 points each). The exams will include multiple choice, true-false, and essay type questions. I will not just lecture over material presented in the text, but will also supplement and elaborate on the material in the text. You are expected to keep up with the readings.

If you do miss an examination and have a legitimate reason for doing so, you must make it up within 72 hours after the examination was given. All arrangements for missing an examination must be made prior to the time the examination is scheduled. If such arrangements are not made, then no make-up will be given and you will receive a zero for that examination.

2. Each student must participate in two graded discussions before the class. The details of these discussions will be presented later. The first discussion is worth 15% of your final grade, while the second is worth 25% of your final grade.

A policy of these discussions is that groups have the option of "firing" a member who fails to make adequate commitments to the group or who fails to meet the requirements established by that group. If a student is dismissed by a majority vote of the group, he or she may attempt to join some other functioning group in the class. If he or she cannot gain entry, an F for the group discussions will result. The instructor will not "bail out" a student in this situation.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is very important in this class. A group cannot function when its members are not present. Therefore, I expect students to attend regularly. Attendance during class discussions is particularly important--nonattendance during one of these class periods counts as a double absence. On your fifth absence, I have the option of lowering your final grade. Excessive absences can also lead to failing the course. You will have missed a class if you are not there for the entire class period; in other words, staying for only half of the class, coming in five minutes before the end of class, or consistently coming in 10 minutes late does not mean that you attended. In addition, I do not make a distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

If you are not present when your group is scheduled to make a presentation, you will receive a zero for that presentation. **It is not possible to make up a missed group discussion.**

GRADES

All grading is done on a points basis. Each assignment will be given a certain number of points, and a student's grade represents the points earned out of the total possible points for that assignment. The final course grade will be determined on the basis of the total points you earn out of the total possible points. In this course there are 500 total possible points. The scale for determining the final grades will be:

- 92-100% = A
- 84-91% = B
- 76-83% = C
- 68-75% = D
- 67 % and below = F

Thus, for this course the point totals for determining the final grades will be:

460-500 points = A
420-459 points = B
380-419 points = C
340-379 points = D
339 points and below = F

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, he/she should contact the Office for Disability Accommodations (ODA) for information on appropriate policies and procedures. Disabilities covered by ADA may include learning, psychiatric, physical disabilities, or chronic health disorders. Students can contact ODA if they are not certain whether a medical condition/disability qualifies.

Address:

The University of Southern Mississippi
Office for Disability Accommodations
118 College Drive #8586
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Voice Telephone: (601) 266-5024 or (228) 214-3232

Fax 601-266-6035

Individuals with hearing impairments can contact ODA using the *Mississippi Relay Service* at 1-800-582-2233 (TTY) or email Suzy Hebert at Suzanne.Hebert@usm.edu

CMS 330 Small Group Communication
Tentative Course Syllabus

Spring, 2012

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1/18	Course Introduction	
1/20	Communication Competence	Rothwell, Chpt. 1
1/23	Communication Competence (cont.) / Groups as Systems	Rothwell, Chpt. 2
1/25	Groups as Systems (cont.) / Discussion #1 Assignment / Form Groups	
1/27	Defective Decision-Making and Problem Solving	Rothwell, Chpt. 7
1/30	Defective Decision-Making (cont.)	
2/1	Defective Decision-Making (cont.)	
2/3	Effective Decision-Making & Problem Solving	Rothwell, Chpt. 8
2/6	Effective Decision-Making (cont.)	
2/8	Effective Decision-Making (cont.)	
2/10	EXAM 1	
2/13	Critical Thinking	Rothwell, Appendix B
2/15	Critical Thinking	
2/17	Work Session	
2/20	Mardi Gras Holiday	
2/22	Discussion #1	
2/24	Discussion #1	
2/27	Discussion #1	
2/29	Discussion #1 Last Day to Drop without Academic Penalty	
3/2	Discussion #1	
3/5	Discussion #2 Assignment / Work session	
3/7	Group Development	Rothwell, Chpt. 3

3/9 Group Development (cont.)

3/12-3/16 Spring Break

3/19 Developing Group Climate Rothwell, Chpt. 4

3/21 Developing Group Climate (cont.)

3/23 **EXAM 2**

3/26 Roles and Leadership in Groups Rothwell, Chpt. 5

3/28 Roles and Leadership (cont.)

3/30 Roles and Leadership (cont.)

4/2 Developing Effective Teams Rothwell, Chpt. 6

4/4 Effective Teams (cont.)

4/6 **Good Friday Holiday**

4/9 Power in Groups Rothwell, Chpt. 9

4/11 Power in Groups (cont.)

4/13 Conflict Management in Groups / SSCA (?) Rothwell, Chpt. 10

4/16 Conflict Management (cont.)

4/18 Conflict Management (cont.)/ Work session

4/20 Work session

4/23 Work session

4/25 **Discussion #2**

4/27 **Discussion #2**

4/30 **Discussion #2**

5/2 **Discussion #2**

5/4 **Discussion #2**

THIRD EXAM—Wednesday, May 9th, 1:30-2:45 p.m.

CMS 330 Small Group Communication
Dr. Hosman
Discussion 1: Value--75 points

Spring, 2012

Choose a topic that all members of your group are interested in, and then phrase a question which meets the criteria of clarity, objectivity, and controversiality. The question should be clear—all group members should understand the meaning of the question the same way. This may require defining key terms in the question. The question should be objectively worded—the question should not be worded in such a way to suggest that one answer is better or more preferred than another answer. The question should also be controversial—reasonable people should disagree over answers to the question. If the question is not controversial, there is little reason for a group to be discussing it. The question must be one of either fact or conjecture. A question of fact focuses on what is true, whereas a question of conjecture focuses on what is probable. The latter type typically deals with future events but is by no means restricted to them exclusively.

Use your work sessions to select a topic, phrase a question, appoint a chairperson if necessary, exchange names and other contact information, decide what limitations, if any, you wish to impose on the question, and begin to develop a tentative agenda. Between work sessions, you should proceed independently to work on the question and to try to familiarize yourself with as much relevant information as possible in the time you have available. The final work session can be used to determine if there are last minute problems which the group as a whole needs to work out prior to its discussion and to set the final version of the agenda.

If the work sessions are to be of any value, you have to assume responsibility for initiating ideas. Therefore, try to come prepared for each session and do whatever may be necessary to facilitate the group's task.

Even though some people feel that a preliminary run through is helpful, the discussion itself should be a spontaneous event; that is, participants should react to one another's contributions as they arise. What any member says at a given point is partially determined by what has preceded and what is called for in terms of the group's agenda. A decision-making discussion, in other words, is not a rehearsed performance. To be meaningful, interaction cannot and should not be planned.

The previous remarks do not imply that decision-making discussions are unstructured. On the contrary, a group should have a general outline or agenda on which the substance of its discussion focuses, but an agenda is not a script. Think of yourself as being part of a jury, or other such fact-finding group. Such groups examine information and try to reach a conclusion about what is true or likely. They do not engage in rehearsed performances.

Each group must turn in a copy of its discussion agenda, and each group member must turn in a bibliography of research materials used in or consulted for the discussion.

Sample Questions of Fact

1. Is coffee harmful?
2. Do cell phones cause cancer?
3. Does violence in television programming contributed to societal violence?

4. Is sex education effective?
5. Do homeopathic medicines work?

Sample Questions of Conjecture

1. Would national health insurance improve the quality of medical care in the United States?
2. Would federal gun control legislation have an appreciable effect on the crime rate?
3. What would be the effects of legalizing marijuana?
4. Will eliminating the 55-MPH speed limit affect highway deaths?

CMS 330 Small Group Communication
Dr. Hosman
Discussion 2--Value: 125 points

Spring, 2012

Choose a topic that all members of your group are interested in, and then phrase a question which meets the criteria of clarity, objectivity, and controversiality. The question must be one of policy. Remember, a question of policy entails choosing a course of action. Sometimes the options are predetermined or otherwise restricted as in the case of the question "Should the term of office of the President of the United States be extended to six years?" More often than not, however, the members of a policy group must generate alternative courses of action and then consider their merits in relation to carefully selected criteria and decisional rules. In either case, the objective is to determine which of the courses of action the group is considering will best reduce some apparent difficulty or bring about a desired state of affairs.

In dealing with questions of policy, it may become necessary to resolve other kinds of issues (fact, conjecture, and value) prior to making a final choice. A common mistake is to assume that preference is the only basis for choice; that is, if a majority of the members think that one alternative is better than the others, then that is the best choice. Because policy questions are frequently complicated by the need to dispose of numerous subordinate issues, you will have to draw on a considerable fund of knowledge and make a careful analysis of what your information shows in order to have much assurance of making the most defensible choice.

The important factor to remember is that you need to consider the full range of alternatives. When a decision-making group prematurely limits its options, it almost automatically increases the likelihood that the best possible choice will not be among them.

The comments about rehearsing the discussion apply to this assignment as they did in the first discussion requirement.

This discussion must be organized using the Standard Agenda (Chapter 8 of the text).

Each group must turn in a copy of its discussion agenda, and each group member must turn in a bibliography of research materials used in or consulted for the discussion.

Sample Questions of Policy

1. What should be the United States' policy concerning immigration?
2. What can be done to ensure citizens' safety in high crime areas?
3. What can be done to reduce drinking and driving?
4. What changes, if any, should be made in adoption or surrogacy laws?
5. What changes, if any, should be made in pornography laws?
6. Should a driving-while-texting (DWT) law be passed in Mississippi?