

COM320: Small Group Communication

Fall 2023

Instructor: Professor Torsten Reimer
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Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30 – 11:45 a.m.
Beering Hall, BRNG 2275
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 1:30-2:30 p.m. and by appointment

Please read me, twice, and refer to me often.

TEXT & COURSE MATERIALS

- Reimer, T., Park, E. S., & Bonito, J. A. (Eds.) (2024). Group Communication: An Advanced Introduction. Routledge/Taylor & Francis. (Copies of select chapters of the forthcoming book will be shared through Brightspace.)
- A reliable computer with Internet access.
- Other readings and resources will be assigned and made available on Brightspace.
- Visual aids (power-point slides and videos) and memos will be posted on the Brightspace page. These materials are not a substitute for the readings. Both the readings and supplemental material will appear in the exams.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The overarching aim of our class is to gain a better understanding of how groups and teams function. What factors affect communication in groups? What are the opportunities—and pitfalls—of teamwork? How can communication and decision-making processes in groups be improved? We will survey theories and concepts from diverse areas in communication and psychology that can help us better understand group interactions and discussions. Topics include the role of group identity and cohesion, group decision making and creativity, leadership and social networks. One section of the class focuses on the role of technology in groups including theories about human AI teaming and online communities, and one section discusses group communication in applied contexts, including the context of health and sports. During the course, students will learn about current theories and research underlying our understanding of groups. Students will apply theories to analyze real-world groups and relate the theories to their own experiences. The class will provide opportunities to understand group dynamics and apply them through analyzing case studies and working on group projects.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course has the goal:

- To foster understanding, critique, analysis, and integration of recent theory and research related to group processes;
- To help students acknowledge the methods communication scholars and psychologists use to study groups and teams;
- To encourage the application of group research in order to explain and understand the role of communication in everyday group situations; and
- To develop and practice skills related to collaborative group work.

ASSIGNMENTS

The course is divided into four modules. Assignments for this class include four types of **individual assignments** (discussion board contributions, exams, meeting reflections, and a variety of class activities), and three **group assignments** (group contract, case study analysis, and final group project). The class also offers an extra credit option (see description below).

1) Individual Component

The individual component includes discussion board assignments (one related to each module), exams (midterm and final), meeting reflections (two short reflections), and various class activities.

Discussion Board Q&A (4 assignments; 120 points total)

Each of the four modules has a discussion board component. Each student is expected to reply to one of the discussion prompts on each module (20 points) and comment at least one time on a response posted by a peer (10 points). This is an individual (and not a group) assignment. Comments should be substantive, hovering around 200 words. Your comments will be graded on quality.

When writing paragraphs, I recommend using a thesis statement, referencing the textbook or other academic reading material, and providing a thought-provoking analysis. There will be times when you disagree with a post and I encourage you to respond, however please do so with grace and tact, not with fallacious reasoning. The discussion questions are intended to promote healthy discourse.

Meeting Reflections (2 assignments; 100 points total)

Throughout the semester, you should on two occasions write a reflection on a group meeting that your team held. This does not have to be very long (about 2 double-spaced pages), but it should reflect on what went well in the meeting and what went poorly. You may also include a comment about how you felt that you did in the meeting, whether you came prepared, whether you helped create a good group climate, what role you played in the group, and/or what you contributed to the group. In addition, you should write about how you and the group could improve to have better meetings. Your reflection should include at least one group concept that is discussed in our readings. You should be working on these assignments throughout the semester, turning in the first reflection before the midterm and the second reflection before the presentation of your final group project.

Exams (2 exams; 300 points total)

The class has a midterm exam and a final exam. Exams will cover the reading assignments, handouts, lectures, class discussions, demonstrations, and audio-visual materials used in class. Generally, exams will include multiple choice, fill in the gaps, short answer as well as some essay questions. Make-up exams are *only* available in case of excused absences, which have to be provided in advance (in case of religious holidays or athletic events) or within three days after returning to class (in case of documented illness). A study guide will be distributed in advance of each exam.

Class Activities (80 points)

Students are expected to: 1) read the assigned chapters and articles before class; 2) come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignments; and 3) actively participate in the class (e.g., respond to questions and comments posed by others, ask questions about the readings). Participating in class does not just mean talking. Good class participation involves volunteering answers to questions that are insightful, actively listening to others' contributions to discussion, and moving the discussion along toward a shared understanding. Several short assignments are related to in-class activities, which will be worth 80 points.

2) Group Component

Students will be responsible for participating in three group assignments: a group contract, a case study, and a final project. Projects are an important part of the course because they provide an opportunity to apply the principles discussed in class in a simulated group environment. Every member in a group will receive the same grade for the group's work unless a group member is breaking the group's contract. If a member in your group violates your group's contract and should be penalized, please let me know as soon as possible.

Group Contract (50 points)

As a part of your group, you will need to develop a group contract. The process will help you in getting to know your group members, establish and communicate expectations and group goals. The contract will be a written document in which you, as a group, will establish an agenda and processes through which the group will function. The contract should be around 1-2 pages long. You may want to come up with a unique name for your group.

This contract should clearly describe three main things: 1) who is in the group (you might consider including roles as well, if you have an idea of what those roles might be), 2) what the group goals are, and 3) what the group standards are (expectations for the number of meetings, timing of meetings, flow of the group, what happens if a group member is violating group rules). Each member should sign the document.

Group Project 1: Group Case Study (100 points)

This assignment is designed to give you the opportunity to play the role of a consulting team by critically analyzing and presenting a viable solution to a problem relevant to small group communication. For this assignment, you will find and profile an existing small team or group or analyze a case study. The group that you analyze may be part of a company in the workplace, a more informal group, or anything between. You should not select a group of which you are a part. You will do online research (e.g., company websites) to find out if and how they are using group communication. **As a case, you can also analyze a group or team from a movie.**

Your analysis should not be a simple description. Instead, analyze what that small group or team is doing well or poorly, based on the theories discussed in class. Based on your analysis of the case, your team will write an executive brief (3-4 double-spaced pages) highlighting your diagnosis of the group's problems and your proposed solutions. You will also create a presentation as a group. Your grade for the project will be based on the brief and presentation.

Group Project 2: Assembly Bonus Effects (250 points)

Find something that your group would be good at. Your group may do anything from a musical performance, to stock investment, to starting a company. This project may take one of two forms. The first option is to create a presentation where you show your group performing this task, along with an explanation as to why your group is better than either individuals or other groups at this particular task. The second option is to create a presentation that details how your group would hypothetically perform this task. Both options also require written materials that detail how you reached the decision on what to do, a detailed explanation of the roles that group members played, self-evaluation as a group, and a profile of your group as individuals that makes sense for the task. Your profiles may look like a resume, cameos for each person, short bios, or whatever makes sense to your situation. Details on your group project and the related assignments (group presentation, paper) will be provided by the end of your first module.

3) Extra Credit (30 points)

Students will earn **10 extra credit points** if they actively participate in class discussions and activities throughout the semester and do not have more than two unexcused absences. No extra credit points for class participation will be awarded to students who are absent from three or more classes or to students who do not actively contribute to class discussions.

In addition, there are **2 options** for earning extra credit in this course. You can earn **up to 20 points of extra credit** using either option or any combination of the two.

Option 1: The Brian Lamb School's Participation System <https://purdue-comm.sona-systems.com/>

You may earn extra credit by participating in research studies being conducted in the communication department. Each study is different. Some will have no restrictions on participants, and some will be interested in only a specific population. Check the site often to look for opportunities. Do not assume that there will be online studies available to you at the end of the class.

The system assigns percentages to each study depending on how long participation should take. A study that should take half an hour is assigned 0.5%; a study that should take a full hour is assigned 1%; and so on. You will receive 10 points extra credit for every 1% (1 hour) of study participation you complete, up to a possible total of 20 extra credit points (or 2% in the participation system.)

Option 2: Identification and Description of High-Quality Group

You may earn extra credit by identifying examples of high-quality groups (maybe a group achieved a process gain or solved a difficult problem), you can post it to the Brightspace page along with a paragraph-long explanation of what makes it noteworthy.

Each example you post is worth 10 points. You can earn up to 20 extra credit points.

Post your examples in the "Extra Credit" forum on our Brightspace discussion page. As a class, we should have only one thread for each concept or idea from the course. Check to see if someone has already posted an example using the same theory or group concept. If a thread already exists, post your example and explanation as a reply in that same thread. If no thread exists, create one and put the name of the group concept in the "Subject" line.

GRADING OVERVIEW

Assignment	Maximum Points	
Individual Assignments	Points	Total
Four Discussion Board Assignments	4 x 30	120
Two Exams	2 x 150	300
Two Meeting Reflections	2 x 50	100
Class Activities	80	80
Group Assignments		
Group Contract	50	50
Case Study Analysis	100	100
Group Final Project	250	250
Total		1,000
Extra credit		30

Total possible points for the semester = 1,000 points.

Your final course grade will be computed by dividing the total number of points earned by the total number of possible points and multiplying by 100 to obtain a percentage of points earned. The final letter grade will then be assigned according to the following grading scale: A+ (98-100%); A (93-97%); A- (90-92%); B+ (88-89%); B (83-87%); B- (80-82%); C+ (78-79%); C (73-77%); C- (70-72%); D+ (68-69%); D (63-67%); D- (60-62%); F (below 60%).

POLICIES

Academic Integrity

The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. The failure of any student to meet these standards may result in suspension or expulsion from the university and/or other sanctions including an "F" in the course (based on instructor and university discretion in consideration of the violation). Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating such activities. Papers submitted for credit in other classes may *not* be submitted for credit in this course. The university academic integrity policies are included in the *Student*

Code of Honor section of the *University Regulations* handbook. In all cases, academic integrity violations will be reported to university officials.

Attendance and Due Dates

If you have a legitimate excuse, you can reschedule an assignment due date or an exam. In such a case, you must provide a letter signed by a person in a position to make authoritative determination regarding the validity of the cause of absence (e.g., a doctor in case of illness, university officials regarding campus activities). Permission to turn in a late assignment will be granted *only* if requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. In the case of an emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as physically possible or you will earn no points for this assignment. Documentation has to be provided no later than three days after returning to class.

Special Needs

Anyone that needs special considerations (i.e., student athletes for practices, games, travel, etc.) must have their schedule approved by the professor by the third class session. In addition, any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Date	TOPIC	READINGS	WHAT IS DUE?
Aug 22	Introduction: Group Communication	Syllabus	
Module 1: Groups and Teams--Foundation			
Aug 24 & 29	Topic 1: Groups and Identity	Chapter 2	
Aug 31 & Sep 5	Topic 2: Theories and Methods	Chapters 3 and 4	Group Contract
Sep 7 & 12	Topic 3: Social Networks	Chapter 17	
Sep 14	<i>Reserved for Group Project I</i>		Discussion Board I
Module 2: Group Processes and Outcomes			
Sep 19 & 21	Topic 4: Leadership and Conflict	Chapters 9, 10, & 11	
Sep 26 & 28	Topic 5: Group Conformity and Influence	Chapter 12; Gass & Seiter, Chapter 6	Reflection 1
Oct 3	<i>First Exam</i>		Exam
Oct 5	<i>Reserved for Group Project I</i>		
Oct 10	<i>NO CLASS - OCTOBER BREAK</i>		
Oct 12 & 17	Topic 6: Decision Making and Creativity	Chapters 15 and 16	Discussion Board II
Oct 19 & 24	<i>Presentation Group Project I</i>		Group Case Study
Module 3: The Digital Turn: Online Groups and Human AI Teaming			
Oct 26 & 31	Topic 7: The Use of Technology	Chapter 5	
Nov 2	Topic 8: Human AI Teaming	Chapter 24	
Nov 7	Topic 9: Online Communities	Chapter 20	Discussion Board III
Module 4: Contexts of Group Communication			
Nov 9	Topic 10: Groups in Health Contexts	Chapter 22	
Nov 14 & 16	<i>Reserved for Group Project II</i>		
Nov 21 & 23	Topic 11: Sports Teams	Chapters 6 and 23	
Nov 23	<i>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</i>		
Nov 28	Topic 12: Function of Groups in Society	Chapter 19	Discussion Board IV
Nov 30	<i>Second Exam</i>		Exam
Dec 5 & 7	<i>Presentations Group Project II</i>		Reflection 2 Final Group Project