

## **COMM 320: Small Group and Team Communication**

**Fall 2012**

**Monday/Wednesday, 5:00-6:20 pm**

**ASC 231**

**READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS ALWAYS SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

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Office Hours: by appointment (I'm flexible)

### **Description**

This course is designed to provide an overall introduction to topics pertaining to small groups and teams. The ability to work in groups has become one of the most important criteria upon which organizations recruit new employees. The material you will learn in this course will enhance your understanding of small groups and teams. We will review recent theory and research on small group communication and relate these writings to your own experiences in small groups. Topics covered include group formation, leadership, conflict, problem analysis, groupthink, decision rules, group procedures, democratic group behavior, and more. The course will help you to understand theoretical, empirical, and practical aspects of small group communication. The primary objective is to teach you to think critically about how you and others behave in groups, thereby improving the experiences you (and your fellow group-mates) have throughout your life. This is first and foremost a course on *how groups work*, not *how to work in groups* (although understanding the former will help you understand the latter).

### **Grading**

Some students best demonstrate their understanding of course material through exams; others, through projects. In recognition of this, I use two different formulas to calculate your grade (see below) and assign you the *higher* grade.

#### **Grading Formula 1**

Take-home midterm 20%

Take-home final 35%

Group service project 5%

Final group project (paper and presentation) 20%

Analysis paper 10%

Class participation (including article presentations or postings) 10%

#### **Grading Formula 2**

Take-home midterm 15%

Take-home final 25%

Group service project 5%

Final group project (paper and presentation) 35%

Analysis paper 10%

Class participation (including article presentations or postings) 10%

It should also be noted that I think the standard number to letter grade scale used in most of your classes is the stupidest and most arbitrary thing in the world. Who decided that an A student must get 93% of all questions correct? If an A means "excellent," who says that getting 80% isn't

excellent if an exam is challenging? I will figure out number to letter grades after I see scores.

### **Exams**

There will be one midterm and a final exam. These exams are TAKE-HOME and OPEN-BOOK. Both will go out on a Wednesday and be due the following Wednesday. You ARE allowed to talk to classmates about the exams (this is a class about working together after all) as long as you acknowledge in detail who you consulted with and what portions of your answers emerged from consulting with others (consulting with others will not affect your grade, positively or negatively). Every student will have to write up his or her own answers though, and you will be asked to submit your exams to Turnitin to make sure your writing is original.

It should be noted that there will be material covered in lecture not in the readings and material in the readings not covered in lecture. Exams will not discriminate between this material. The midterm will cover the first 7 weeks of the semester. The final will be cumulative and cover the entire course.

### **Group Assignments**

Since this is a class on small group and team communication, it should come as no surprise that you will be assigned to a small group and some of your assignments will be done together. The assignments will be made during the third week of the semester. Groups will be asked to do three things together:

1. Groups will be expected to meet at least one hour per week outside of class time. To ensure this happens, groups should schedule a standard weekly meeting time and place. You should let me know what this time and place is so that I know that group members have made the time commitment to one another. These hour meetings will be used to discuss class material and plan your group assignments. These group meetings will not count towards your grade per se, but your teammates' evaluation of you could lower or raise your final project grade.
2. All groups will do a small community service project early in the semester. The primary objective of this assignment is to engage you in planning and coordinating to perform an unpaid service for some organization. Your group will provide an in-class report on your project on either 10/1, 10/3, 10/8, 10/10 (to be assigned once the class size has been determined). No paper will be required.
3. All groups will also do a final project together. What is this final group project? Well, I don't know. We will be spending Weeks 4-6 deal with theories related to group discussions and decisions. Using what we learn, the class will design the requirements of the final project. The only requirements I will provide are as follows:
  - The final project will involve 15-20 pages of writing (due 11/19) and an in-class presentation (either on 11/26 or 11/28 based on class size)
  - The final project will use class material as a starting point but then go much further . Going much further could include *extensive* library research/literature review, data collection, and/or observations of groups.
  - The final project should not be something that can be done a few days before it is due. Once the class has designed the project, groups should be working on the project throughout the remainder of the semester.
  - The final project should be the equivalent of a "typical" final project workload

multiplied by your group size.

- Another important component will be peer evaluation, as each member will be asked to evaluate other members' participation in the group project. Therefore, not all group members will receive the same grade.
- All of the requirements I just gave can be thrown out the window if the class can justify it to me.

### Analysis Paper

This paper allows you to reflect on processes of your group during the semester. You will write a 5-7 page paper applying course content towards critiquing and understanding one's own group. You should keep a journal throughout the group projects to help refresh memory and provide documentation for the paper.

### Readings

- Textbook: *The Group in Society* by John Gastil (abbreviated *GIS* on syllabus)
  - I reviewed a lot of textbooks on groups, and not only did I like this one the best, it was also the least expensive (almost half the price of most textbooks on the subject).
- Full length book: *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki
  - This is a full book, but we will only spend one week on it, so I recommend you start reading it early.
- Full length play or movie: *12 Angry Men*
  - You will have the option of reading either the play or watch the movie version of *12 Angry Men*. If you'd like to read the play, you can find it on Amazon here: <http://www.amazon.com/Twelve-Angry-Men-Penguin-Classics/dp/0143104403>. If you'd like to watch the movie (96 minutes), it is available in its entirety on YouTube here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0NINOI5LG0>. If there is interest (and the room is available), we can watch it after class one evening (for those who can attend).
- Journal articles and book chapters from edited volumes (posted on Blackboard)
  - Sometimes you will be asked to read *specific* journal articles. For these articles read by everyone, please read for the assigned date and only the assigned date. Some weeks we may do in-class exercises that resemble the studies before we actually read them, so while I value conscientiousness, *please do not read ahead for these particular studies*.
  - Other times, you will be individually assigned journal articles *at random*. Normally, you will be notified at least two weeks in advance as to which articles you've been randomly assigned.

To ensure that you do the reading as well as to enlighten students about a reading they might not have been assigned to read, I'd like it so that everybody can share a summary with everybody else. There are two possible ways we can do this:

- Possibility 1: Every class session a few students might be called on at random (using some method of truly random selection) to give a *brief* (approximately 5 minute) presentation about one of the article. I understand that some weeks personal commitments make it impossible to do the assigned reading on time.

Thus, you will be allowed to have two “freebie articles,” where if you email me by noon before a class, I will guarantee that you will not be called on to present (absences count as freebies). Based on the final class size, I will also set a limit as to how many times you will be asked to present an article. With Possibility 1, you will be strongly encouraged, but not required, to incorporate the random articles read by others into your exam answers.

- Possibility 2: When articles are assigned at random, *all* students will be expected to write a discussion post on their randomly assigned articles before class on Monday and a follow-up post by Friday (discussing how the week’s lecture material further illuminated your understanding of the article). This post will include a summary of the article and a personal analysis about the article. You will also have to comment on other students’ posts. With Possibility 2, you will be required to incorporate the random articles read by others into your exam answers.

Each possibility has its pros and cons. *As an exercise, on the first day of class, you as a group will decide which of the possibilities will be the one we will do this semester.*

### **Attendance and Participation**

Please read the attendance rules very carefully:

- A student’s first two absences will be excused as long as you let me know by noon the day of class that you will not be there (you do not have to tell me why you’ll be absent though). If you fail to notify me in advance, the excused absence will be forfeited.
- After a student has been absent twice, absences will be unexcused unless specified below. Even if you are taking an unexcused absence, you must notify me by noon the day of class that you will not be there (failure to do so will result in 1.5 unexcused absences).
- After a student has been absent twice, absences will only be excused for *serious* medical issues (e.g. hospital serious), deaths in the family, university approved athletic travel, and religious observances. While all four of these cases are always excused, only religious observances will not count towards your first two excused absences (For example, if your first two absences are for athletic travel, you can’t miss a third class due to a minor cold, but if your first two absences are for minor colds, you can miss a third class due to athletic travel. On the other hand, if your first two absences are due to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, you *can* miss a third class due to a minor cold.) However, even in these excusable cases, you must let me know by noon the day of class that you will not be there and provide documentation by the next time you see me (at the latest); otherwise, you will be marked for half an unexcused absence.
- Unexcused absences will result in severe grade penalties. *More than 3 unexcused absences may result in failing the course.*

Participation is important. You will be expected to contribute to class discussions and will occasionally be asked to present the outcomes of your hands-on exercises. In addition, it is expected to come to class having done the reading.

Participation is also why I have the strict policy about letting me know by noon the day of class that you will not be there. Because the sizes of groups during hands-on exercises may vary from week-to-week, I need an accurate head count to figure out in-class group assignments in

advance. Also, if you choose Possibility 1, I need to know by noon because it affects the random selection procedures for journal article presentation.

### **Extra Credit**

There may be some extra credit opportunities as the semester progresses. If these opportunities arise, you will be notified. There will be at least one big extra credit opportunity: Unfortunately, we have class scheduled on Halloween, so in order to make it up to you, there will be a Halloween costume contest. However, there is a catch: your group must come in costume dressed as any group of your choice. The winning team will receive a grade bump on their final class grade. In order to be eligible, your entire group must come in costume.

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

**There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism (be intentional or unintentional), unauthorized collaboration or use of answers from other exams. Be sure you know what constitutes plagiarism by visiting**

**[http://www.usc.edu/libraries/about/reference/tutorials/academic\\_integrity/index.php](http://www.usc.edu/libraries/about/reference/tutorials/academic_integrity/index.php).**

**Ignorance about what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse. I really recommend you take the tutorial, as we have found at Annenberg that most students are not actually aware as to what constitutes plagiarism.**

### **My Warning/Promise to You**

This is a challenging class. It may end up being more demanding than your typical Annenberg course. However, if you agree to accept my challenge, I will be generous with grades (both on assignments and calculating final grades) and do everything in my power to help you succeed in this class.

Schedule  
(Readings and pacing subject to change based on class progress)

**Important Dates**

10/1, 10/3, 10/8, 10/10	Group service project presentations (date assigned)
10/10 (W)	Take-home midterm handed out in lecture
10/17 (W)	Take-home midterm due in lecture
10/31 (W)	Extra credit Halloween Costume Contest
11/19 (M)	Final group paper due by email/Turnitin by <u>6:20 pm</u>
11/26 (M) & 11/28 (W)	Final group presentations (date assigned)
12/5 (W)	Individual analysis paper due
12/5 (W)	Take-home final handed out in lecture
12/12 (W)	Take-home final due in my mailbox (ASC G6) by <u>5:00 pm</u>

**Class does not meet: 9/3 (Labor Day), 11/19 (group papers due), and 11/21 (Thanksgiving)**

Weeks 1 & 2

**Introduction to Small Groups**

- 8/27 No readings for the firsts day of class
- 8/29 *GIS*, Preface and Ch. 1 (~24 pages)  
Clapp, J. D., Holmes, M. R., Reed, M. B., Shillington, A. M., Freisthler, B., & Lange, J. E. (2007). Measuring college students' alcohol consumption in natural drinking environments: Field methodologies for bars and parties. *Evaluation Review*, 31(5), 469-489. doi:10.1177/0193841x07303582 (~18 pages)
- 9/3 **LABOR DAY**  
**NO CLASS**
- 9/5 Clapp, J. D., Min, J. W., Shillington, A. M., Reed, M. B., & Ketchie Croff, J. (2008). Person and environment predictors of blood alcohol concentrations: A multi-level study of college parties. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 32(1), 100-107. doi:10.1111/j.1530-0277.2007.00547.x (~7 pages)  
Diehl, M. & Stroebe, W. (1987). Productivity loss in brainstorming groups: Toward the solution of a riddle. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3), 497-509. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.53.3.497 (~12 pages)

Week 3

**Small Groups in Society**

Theoretical foci: Group competence and task effectiveness

- 9/10 *GIS*, Ch. 2 (~23 pages)  
1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)
- 9/12 Deeter-Schmelz, D. R., Kennedy, K. N., & Ramsey, R. P. (2002). Enriching our understanding of student team effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 24(2), 114-124. doi:10.1177/0273475302242004 (~9 pages)  
Aggarwal, P., & O'Brien, C. L. (2008). Social loafing on group projects: Structural antecedents and effect on student satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 30(3), 255-264. doi:10.1177/0273475308322283 (~9 pages)

#### Week 4

##### **Group Decision Making**

Theoretical foci: Social influence and decision making

9/17 *GIS*, Ch. 3 (~22 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

9/19 Read or watch *12 Angry Men* (~96 pages or 96 minutes)

Sunstein, C. R. (2007). Group polarization and *12 Angry Men*. *Negotiation Journal*, 23(4), 443-447. doi:10.1111/j.1571-9979.2007.00155.x (~5 pages)

#### Week 5

##### **Discussion Procedures**

Theoretical focus: Effective discussion procedures

9/24 *GIS*, Ch. 4 (~13 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

9/26 Brittain, J., & Sitkin, S. B. (1990). Facts, figures, and organizational decisions: Carter racing and quantitative analysis in the organizational behavior classroom. *Journal of Management Education*, 14(1), 62-81. doi:10.1177/105256298901400108 (~20 pages)

#### Weeks 6 & 7

##### **Idea and Information Flows**

Theoretical foci: Diversity, creativity, information flows, and transactive memory systems

**NOTE: YOU WILL BE ASSIGNED ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR DATES TO PRESENT YOUR GROUP SERVICE PROJECT**

10/1 *GIS*, Ch. 5 (~22 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

10/3 Karan, G., Christian, T., & Karl, T. U. (2010). Idea generation and the quality of the best idea. *Management Science*, 56(4), 591-605. doi:10.2307/2393872.1997-02187-00510.2307/2393872 (~13 pages)

10/8 Stasser, G., & Stewart, D. (1992). Discovery of hidden profiles by decision-making groups: Solving a problem versus making a judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 426-434. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.63.3.426 (~9 pages)

Wittenbaum, G. M., Hollingshead, A. B., & Botero, I. C. (2004). From cooperative to motivated information sharing in groups: Moving beyond the hidden profile paradigm. *Communication Monographs*, 71(3), 286 - 310. doi:10.1080/0363452042000299894 (~20 pages)

**BRING SIGNIFICANT OTHER OR CLOSE OPPOSITE-SEX FRIEND FOR AN EXERCISE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS**

10/10 Hollingshead, A. B. (1998). Communication, learning, and retrieval in transactive memory systems. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 34(5), 423-442. doi:10.1006/jesp.1998.1358 (~18 pages)

Brandon, D. P., & Hollingshead, A. B. (2004). Transactive memory systems in organizations: Matching tasks, expertise, and people. *Organization Science*, 15(6), 633-644. (~10 pages)

**MIDTERM GOES OUT IN CLASS**

### Week 8

#### **Team Leadership**

Theoretical foci: Teamwork, leadership, roles, and status

10/15 *GIS*, Ch. 6 (~23 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

10/17 No reading

**MIDTERM DUE IN CLASS**

### Week 9

#### **Group Bonding**

Theoretical foci: Relational communication, cohesion, and interpersonal conflict

10/22 *GIS*, Ch. 7 (~19 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

(I also recommend you start reading *The Wisdom of Crowds* since you need to read the entire book by 11/12 and it is ~305 pages long)

10/24 Gross, M. A., & Guerrero, L. K. (2000). Managing conflict appropriately and effectively: An application of the competence model to Rahim's organizational conflict styles. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11(3), 200-226. (~25 pages)

### Week 10

#### **Social Identity**

Theoretical foci: Norms, socialization, symbolic convergence, and social identity

10/29 *GIS*, Ch. 8 (~23 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

10/31 Kane, A. A., Argote, L., & Levine, J. M. (2005). Knowledge transfer between groups via personnel rotation: Effects of social identity and knowledge quality. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 96(1), 56-71.  
doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2004.09.002 (~13 pages)

**GROUP HALLOWEEN COSTUME CONTEST**

### Week 11

#### **Learning and Growth in Groups**

Theoretical foci: Unconscious behavior, individual learning, and group development

11/5 *GIS*, Ch. 9 (~29 pages)

1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

11/7 Readings to be determined

### Week 12

11/12 (M) & 11/14 (W)

#### **The Wisdom of Crowds**

Readings:

11/12 *The Wisdom of Crowds* (~305 pages)

11/14 Readings to be determined

### Week 13

11/19 **FINAL GROUP PAPER DUE BY EMAIL AND TURNITIN BY 6:20 PM**



**NO CLASS**  
11/21 **DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING**  
**NO CLASS**

Week 14

11/26 **GROUP PRESENTATIONS ON FINAL PROJECT (SOME GROUPS)**  
10/3 **GROUP PRESENTATIONS ON FINAL PROJECT (REMAINING GROUPS)**

Week 15

12/3 (M) & 12/5 (W) – **ANALYSIS PAPER DUE AND FINAL EXAM GOES OUT ON 12/5**  
**The Power of Knowledge**

Readings:

12/3 *GIS*, Ch. 10 (~17 pages)  
1 randomly assigned journal article (page count varies)

12/5 No reading  
**ANALYSIS PAPER DUE IN CLASS**  
**FINAL EXAM GOES OUT IN CLASS**

Finals Period

12/12 (W) **FINAL EXAM DUE IN MY MAILBOX (ASC G6) AND TURNITIN BY 5**