

**SMALL GROUP THEORY**  
**Fall 2007**  
**Speech Communication 5090**

**TEXT:** Ellis, D.G., & Fisher, B. A. (1994). Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group process, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc  
Frey, L.R. (2002). New Directions in Group Communication. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

**INSTRUCTOR:** Nancy Tobler

**OFFICE HOURS:** MW 1:00 to 2:00 Old Main 204

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**OBJECTIVES:**

This course is designed to provide an advanced understanding of small group theory. The only problem is that we do not have a beginning course in small group theory. Consequently, we will do some catch up work when needed to provide the necessary background. Small group work exists in all aspects of our lives. This course provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of this important area of communication. The best way to come to an advanced level of understanding of a knowledge area is to (a) read the literature, (b) decide what important questions still need to be addressed, (c) based on the literature design a method, (d) gather data, (e) analyze the data and (f) report on your findings. Based on your interests in the future, you may choose to do a basic or applied research project. If you are planning on attending graduate school, a basic research project is recommended and if you are planning on going into a profession, an applied study is recommended. The course will first look at basic human communication theory. The second goal will be to look at the four main theoretical approaches to small group theory. The third goal will be to discuss methods and the advantages and disadvantages of each method. The specific topics beyond these basics will be decided as a class.

**Participation: 70 points**

Class meetings will combine discussion of theory and exercises designed to apply theory. An understanding of the theory is vital to success of the class. The texts are research based. The class time will be used to both explain the theory and to apply the theory. Your attendance will be crucial. Participation points will be given based on your in-class activity. These are graded on a 0 to 5 scale. These cannot be made up. Two class periods can be missed without participation points being impacted.

**Group Research Paper: 250 points**

This may either be a basic research study or an applied study. You will need to work fast. 15 weeks is a short time to complete an entire study. We will need to pick an area of interest the second week of class.

Project Proposal	15 points
CITI training	10 points
Review of Literature Presentation	25 points
Final Paper	100 points
Group member grade	50 points

**Present Group Research Paper 25**

**Individual Analysis of Research Group: 100**

**Journal: 10 points**

You need to keep a journal of your group meetings. Keep a record of each time your group meets. I anticipate at least 5 meetings. Your group may have more. Record who was present? What was the task for the meeting? As the quarter progresses you may see roles emerge, norms established, primary tension, secondary tension, take note of these group dynamics in your journal. Remain as objective as a participant can in your recording of the group meetings. Record as soon after the meeting as possible. Time has a way of distorting reality. What we are learning in class and the readings should be applied to your journal. It is a record of what is happening in your group and your continual analysis of the group progress. You will turn this in... DON'T write anything in this journal of a personal nature. Certainly, do not attack group members. That is not productive. Use your journal to keep track of your perceptions of the group process. The written journal is required. You cannot turn in a final paper without a journal.

**Individual Final Paper: 75**

You will have a final paper that analyzes your group as a site of study. This will be 5 to 7 typed, double-spaced and follow academic publishing standards. You should include appendixes or accompanying supporting material. You will be required to choose one topic to discuss, for example leadership emergence. The paper will briefly summarize what you saw and make suggestions as to what groups might do differently in order to be more effective. Your paper will combine the "reality" of your group meetings to the theory of how groups work or can work. The paper must be typed, double spaced, free from grammatical errors, a thorough examination of your topic area. The journal must be included, but need not be typed. The journal is the basis for the support of your paper.

**Present Individual Paper: 15 points**

**Basic Theory Assessment: 15 points each, total 105.**

Seven assessments were agreed upon, the first four chapters of Ellis and Fisher and the three of the first four chapters in Frey. Groups will divide up the chapter and then each individual member will report on a theory before class on the due date. The report should be short and concrete. We decided that one paragraph should be sufficient to explain a theory in your words. There may not be room to give an example. However, an example may be the best way to explain the theory. The assessments will be graded individually. Assessments are graded based on your understanding and clarity of presentation of the theory.

**Assessments will not be accepted late.**

**Final Grade Scale**

<b>A</b> 93-100	<b>B+</b> 87-89	<b>C+</b> 77-79	<b>D+</b> 67-69
<b>A-</b> 90-92	<b>B</b> 83-86	<b>C</b> 73-76	<b>D</b> 60-66
	<b>B-</b> 80-82	<b>C-</b> 70-72	<b>F</b> 0-59.9

## **TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR:**

Aug. 27 M	Syllabus and Introductions and Group Rules	
Aug. 29 W	Rules and Journal entry due Sept. 4	
Sept. 3 M	No Class Labor Day	
Sept. 5 W	Blackboard. Basis of Theory. Models of Communication. (Draw a Model)	
Sept. 10 M	What is a group?, Group Satisfaction and Cohesiveness	<b>Assessment 1 &amp; 2</b>
	Ellis and Fisher Chap. 1 and 2	
Sept. 12 W	How to do a literature review.	
Sept. 17 M	Group Meeting Time	
Sept 19 W	CITI Training	
Sept. 24 M	Structural Elements and Functional Elements	<b>Assessment 3 &amp; 4</b>
	Ellis and Fisher Chap. 3 and 4	
Sept. 26 W	Meet with Nancy to propose idea.	
Oct. 1 M	Four Small Group Theories	<b>Assessment 1 &amp; 2</b>
	Waldeck, J.H., Shepard, C.A., Teitelbaum, J., Farrar, W.J., & Seibold, D. R. "New Directions for Functional, Symbolic Convergence, Structuration, and BoneFide Group Perspectives of Group Communication & Johnson, S.D., & Long, L.M. "Being A Part and Being Apart: Dialects and Group Communication in Frey, L.R. New Directions in Group Communication	
Oct. 3 W	Methods. Observation and Analysis of Groups	<b>Assessment 5</b>
	Peterson, R.S. The Group Dynamics Q-Sort in Group Communication Research. Frey, Chapter 5	
Oct. 8 W	Practice Observation and Analysis	
Oct. 10. M	Improving Effectiveness Frey chapter 6 and chapter 7	
Oct. 15 M	Group Communication Processes Frey chapter 9 and 10	
Oct. 17 W	Group Communication Processes	
<b>Oct. 22 M</b>	<b>Present Lit Review and Method Discussion</b>	
<b>Oct. 24 W</b>	<b>Present Lit Review and Method Discussion</b>	
Oct. 29 M	Writing the Lit Review	
Oct, 31 W	Practice Data Collection	
<b>Nov. 5 M</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	

**Nov. 7 W Data Collection**

Nov. 12 M Norms and Roles  
Nov 14 W Leadership

Nov 19 M Technology and Groups  
Nov 21 W No Class Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 26 M Group Meeting Time  
**Nov 28 W Present Group Research Project**

**Dec. 3 M Present Group Research Project**  
**Dec. 7 W Meet on Individual Papers**

**Dec. 10 M 9 :30 to 11:20 Final Exam Present Individual Paper Analysis**

**Ellis and Fisher Chapter 1**

Group  
Interaction  
Principle of Groupness  
Principle of Nonsummativity  
System  
    structure  
    function  
    evaluation  
Collective Structure  
Leaderless Group Discussion  
Group Hate  
Self-disclosure  
Reciprocity  
Trust  
Risk

I. What is meant by the term "process"?

- A. Four elements of process?
  - 1. Acts or action
  - 2. Change in time
  - 3. Progress over time
  - 4. Goal
- B. Components of a process are interdependent.
- C. Process involves structure and action.

II. What is meant by the term "group"?

- A. A smorgasbord of definition
  - 1. Groups defined by what they share or have in common
    - a. Perceptions
    - b. Goal
    - c. Common fate
  - 2. Groups are defined by their organizational properties

- a. Roles
      - b. Norms
    - 3. Groups are defined by the interaction among members
  - B. The principle of "groupness"
  - C. The group as a system of communication behaviors
    - 1. Principle of nonsummativity
    - 2. Group as a system
      - a. Structure
      - b. Function
      - c. Evolution
    - 3. Communicative behaviors are the central components of a group
  - D. Leaderless Group Discussion(LGD)
    - 1. A LGD is characterized by self-determination
    - 2. A LGD is composed of members with similar initial status
    - 3. A LGD is a zero-history group
    - 4. A LGD reflects the group process in its natural state
  - E. The size of the "small" group
    - 1. Upper limits
    - 2. Dyad as a group
- III. Why work in Groups?
- A. Groups perform best as complexity of task increases
  - B. Groups are better at judgment decisions
- IV. Individual and the Group
- A. An individual's self-concept develops simultaneously with the group process
    - 1. Social comparisons and the group process
    - 2. Self-disclosure and the group process
    - 3. Interpersonal trust and the group process
    - 4. Risk and the group process.

## **Chapter 2 Key Terms and Outline**

Task Dimension  
 Social Dimension  
 Cohesiveness  
 Productivity  
 Groupthink  
 Interpersonal Attraction  
 Bonding Competence  
 Group Satisfaction  
 Feedback  
 Interaction Management  
 Status  
 Motivation  
 Group Identification

Symbolic Convergence  
Dramatizing Messages  
Fantasy  
Primary Tension  
Secondary Tension  
Group Polarization  
Assembly Effect

## I. Interdependence of Social and Task Dimensions

A. Task and social dimensions of the group process are indistinguishable from each other in interaction

B. Productivity and cohesiveness

1. Productivity and cohesiveness the output of the task and social dimensions
2. Productivity and cohesiveness affect each other reciprocally

C. How to promote cohesiveness in groups.

1. Encourage external threats
2. Create history
3. Establish interdependent goals
4. Accomplish something
5. Develop relationships and shared norms
6. Promote acceptance for group members

D. Groupthink

## II. The Social Dimension

A. Perspectives on the socioemotional climate

1. Increasing interpersonal attraction
  - a. Increase frequency of interaction
  - b. Reciprocate liking and interaction
  - c. Self-disclosure
  - d. Develop bonding competence
  - e. Establish member satisfaction
    - Participation
    - Types of messages
    - Feedback
    - Interaction Management
    - The status hierarchy
    - Motivation
2. Extent to which members identify with the group

B. Symbolic convergence

1. Dramatizing messages
2. Group fantasies

C. Social Tension

1. Primary tension
2. Social tension
3. Managing social tension by confronting the tension

III. The Task Dimension defined

IV. The Task Dimension individual versus group decision making

- A. Group polarization
- B. Efficiency and Speed
- C. The group task
  - 1. The principle of nonsummativity
    - a. Assembly effect
    - b. Psychological independence

### **Chapter 3 Key terms and Outline**

Communication Networks

Network size

Reachability

Density

Centrality

Gatekeeping

Boundary Spanning

Internal Star

External Star

Information Overload

Kinesic Behavior

Paralinguistic

Proxemics

Territory

Resident Advantage

Personal Space

Spatial Ecology

Sociopetal

Sociofugal

I. Feedback Responses

- A. Feedback is inevitable
- B. Communication is a two-way process
- C. Feedback responses are reinforcing and attempts to control

II. Characteristics of Messages

- A. Desirable characteristics of feedback
  - 1. Be specific and clear
  - 2. Support comments with evidence
  - 3. Separate issue from person
  - 4. "Sandwich" negative messages between positive ones
  - 5. Pose situation as a mutual problem
  - 6. Soften negative messages
  - 7. Good timing
  - 8. Proper manner of delivery

- B. Ambiguous messages
- III. Communication Networks
  - A. Three approaches to networks
    - 1. Relational
    - 2. Positional
    - 3. Cultural
  - B. Network measurements
    - 1. Network size
    - 2. Reachability
    - 3. Density
    - 4. Centrality
  - C. Comparison with different types of networks
  - D. Network structures and understanding group processes
    - 1. Centrality
    - 2. Coalitions
- IV. Gatekeeping
  - A. The gatekeeper within the group decision making
  - B. The boundary spanner between networks
- V. Social Structure and Status
- VI. Barrier and Breakdowns-- A Fallacy
- VII. Nonverbal Communication and Group structure
  - A. Proxemics
    - 1. Territoriality and Personal space
      - a. Territory as space ownership
      - b. Personal space and distance zones
        - intimate
        - personal
        - social
        - public
    - 2. Group Spatial Ecology

### **Chapter 4 Key Terms and Outline**

Pragmatic Perspective  
 Communication  
   Process  
   Code  
   Messages  
 Content Dimensions  
 Relationship Dimensions  
 Act  
 Interact



Double Interact  
Wholeness  
Structure  
Function  
Evolution  
Openness  
Feedback  
Cybernetics  
Decision Proposals  
Control Modes  
Symmetry  
Complexity  
Submissive Symmetry  
Competitive Symmetry  
Equivalent Symmetry  
Structuration  
Rules  
Resources

## I. Pragmatics and Communication

### A. The nature of communication

1. Defined as a process of people exchanging messages which are formulated according to principles of a code, in a context.
2. Character of Communication
  - a. Communication is a sequence of actions performed in time
  - b. Engaging in communication is relating with another
  - c. Limiting effect of communication
  - d. Communicative relationships evolve during interaction
  - e. The communicative process is a system of communication

### B. One cannot not communicate

1. Communication is defined as behavior and if behavior has no opposite then one cannot not communicate.
2. Communication need not be successful nor intentional to be communication.

### C. Content and relationship dimensions of messages

1. Content is the information or topic of a message
2. Relationship is the style or how the message is said or done providing information about how the content is to be taken.
3. These dimensions are inseparable in every communicative act much like the task and social dimension of group interaction are inseparable.

### D. Analysis of interaction

1. Individual actions serve many functions in the process of group communication.
2. Many different category systems of communicative functions should be used to understand group processes

### E. Punctuation of interaction

1. Punctuation is organizing elements in order to give meaning to a series of elements
2. to punctuate or order differently is to change the interpretation of the sequence of elements.
3. Most important unit of analysis if they interact or double interact.

## II. The Theoretical Perspective: Modern Systems Theory

### A. The principle of wholeness

1. A system's components are affected by every other component so that changes in one component necessarily effects changes in all others
2. Nonsummativity

### B. Principles of structure, function, and evolution

1. Structure refers to spatial relationships
2. Function refers to actions or what members do
3. Evolution refers to a group's history or changes over time in structure and function.

### C. Principle of openness

1. Open systems takes in and process new information
2. Open systems are self-regulating

## III. Feedback Sequence

- A. Feedback is a sequence of actions, a loop, functioning to maintain normal operation of the system.
- B. Growth and change occurs because of feedback loops

## IV. Dimensions of Communicative Behavior

### A. The content dimension

1. Examination of acts that function to influence the opinions of group members: decision proposals
2. Functions of decisions proposals
  - a. Interpretation
  - b. Substantiation
  - c. Clarification
  - d. Modification
  - e. Agreement
  - f. Disagreement

### B. The relationship dimension

1. Examination of acts that function to control another
2. Three categories of control modes
  - a. one-up
  - b. one-down
  - c. one-across
3. Two kinds of social relationships
  - a. Symmetry
    - submissive symmetry

- competitive symmetry
- equivalent symmetry
- b. Complementary

## V. Group Information Processing and Structuration

### A. Theory of group Structuration

1. Use of rules and resources by group members as tools of interaction.
2. Groups structure themselves over time.

## VI. Nonverbal Functions and Group Interaction

### A. Clarification

1. Nonverbal displays which function to clarify a message
2. Displays such as loudness and pitch

### B. Control

1. Nonverbal cues which signal control

### C. Emotional states

## D. Interpersonal relations

1. inclusion/exclusion cues
2. confirmation/disconfirmation cues
3. control cues
4. emotional cues