

## CMST 2120 • Small Group Communication

Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies

Fall 2017

Section: 001

Room: Main 301

MWF 9:30–10:20 am

**Instructor:** Dr. Sidi Becar Meyara

**Email:** sidi.meyara@usu.edu

**Office:** Old Main 075

**Office Hours:** MWF 12:30 pm – 1:20 pm

**I am also available by appointment.**

### Course Information

#### Course Description and Objectives

The purpose of this class is to introduce you to important theories, concepts, and skills related to competent communication in small group settings. In this course, we will discuss issues of theoretical importance and will explore how group communication theories apply to practical situations in a variety of contexts.

After completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Define and explain basic communication terms and principles that serve as a foundation for competent communication in small groups.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of small group theories and processes such as: verbal and non-verbal communication, cultural differences, leadership, active listening, effective decision-making and problem solving, power, and conflict management.
3. Apply knowledge of group communication theories and concepts by analyzing, adjusting, and improving their own communication in groups.
4. Analyze and critically evaluate small group communication processes and outcomes in examples provided and/or real-life situations.

#### Required Reading

The two textbooks below are required and necessary for successful completion of the course. You may purchase the text from local bookstores as well as online book resellers.

Keyton, J. (2006). *Communicating in groups (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.): Building relationships for group effectiveness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black, L. W. (2010). *Group communication: Cases for analysis, appreciation, and application*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishers.

#### Course policies

Written Assignment Format. All written assignments will be in typed in 12 point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins on all sides of the document. No extra spacing should be added between paragraphs or before or after lines. Although this may seem stringent, it ensures that all students are playing on equal grounds.

Assignment due dates: Written Assignments must be completed, printed, and turned in by the end of class the day they are due.

**Late papers** will receive a 5-point deduction per 24 hours for up to 5 days after the due date (including weekends). No papers will be accepted beyond 5 days and will result in a zero on that assignment.

Missed Assignments. If you miss **any assignment** due date because of a documented illness or emergency situation, you **MUST** provide me with an official note (doctor, police, etc.) justifying why you were not able to make the due date. All notes must be accompanied by a contact number, as this number will be called to verify your illness or emergency.

Policy on Academic Honesty. I expect you to be honest. Any acts of plagiarism will be penalized according to the Student Code of Conduct (Article VI) in place by Utah State University. Please check the university's information online regarding their policies on academic honesty:

[http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=96#Academic\\_Honesty](http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=96#Academic_Honesty)

<http://www.usu.edu/student-services/studentcode/article6.cfm>

### **Disabilities**

Disability Resource Center at Utah State University will work with students needing additional accommodations to academically succeed in this class. Students with ADA-documented physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435)797-2444 voice, (435)797-0740 TTY, (435)797-2444 VP, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible.

### **24/7 Rule Regarding Assignment and Grade Discussions**

You are encouraged to discuss assignments and course grades with me frequently to assess your progress throughout the semester and so we can discuss ways to achieve your goals in this course. In general, grades will not be discussed via email or phone. If you should have a question or complaint regarding a grade, please wait 24 hours before bringing it to my attention. After 24 hours, call or email me with a brief description of your concern. As a general approach, please review any assignment feedback in detail and prepare specific questions and concerns you have before our meeting. In essence, develop your argument before you set up the meeting. You must, however, address the issue within one week of receiving the grade/feedback. After one week, the issue is no longer open for discussion (this time will obviously be truncated for the end of semester assignments). This policy ensures that you think through the points you wish to make, review feedback against assignment criteria, and make improvements for future assignments.

### **Attendance**

Regular attendance and participation is required. Especially due to the nature of this course, where group work is a central component, it is vital that you attend regularly. I understand that life happens, and so my policy is that each person can be allowed to miss two days without giving me excuses or reasons. Missing more than 2 days without a valid excuse will result in your grade being lowered one full letter grade for each additional absence. I excuse absences **ONLY** if they are for documented university sponsored travel or direct personal emergencies. It is your responsibility to provide documentation. Meetings for other classes, appointments with advisors, work excuses, catching rides home and many other personal reasons for missing class are not considered "excused" absences. Any student missing more than 1/3 of the class periods for any reason will not be awarded a passing grade. I will assess attendance at the beginning of class, so please be on time. I will talk to you if you are repeatedly late to class.

### **Professionalism**

Professionalism includes respecting others' opinions, being respectful to those who are speaking during lectures and discussions. It also includes working together in a spirit of cooperation. This is an extremely interactive class, and it is important that we all respect one another, participate to the best of our abilities, and learn to feel comfortable with one another. I will not allow you to be disrespectful toward others.

***A Note About Technology:*** Cellular phones and other electronics are not to be utilized during class time as they distract both the user and the rest of the class. Laptops are permitted for note taking and collaboration, so you should not have your laptop open unless it is time to take notes.

### **Class conduct**

No student is permitted to create a threatening, intimidating, or harassing environment in this course. Classroom civility is a part of the Student Code, and infractions will be pursued through the Student Conduct Coordinator. This course will be conducted in a safe and tolerant environment, and any person who detracts from that environment will be first given a verbal warning about the behavior. If said behavior persists, the student will be asked to leave the class and will not be able to return until the case is settled to the satisfaction of the professor.

### **Assignment Descriptions**

Assignments in this class are divided into individual papers and group projects. Working in groups is essential for success in this course. Group projects involve both group and individual components, and group members all receive the same grade for the group products created for each project. **All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course.**

### **Evaluation**

<b><u>Grading System</u></b>	
<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Participation	<b>25 pts</b>
Discussion Leadership	<b>50 pts</b>
Exam 1	<b>50 pts</b>
Exam 2	<b>50 pts</b>
Individual Paper 1	<b>50 pts</b>
Individual Paper 2	<b>50 pts</b>
Group Project	<b>200 pts</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>475 pts</b>

**The following grading scale will be used in the course:**

A = 93%-100%      A- = 90%-92%

B+ = 87%-89%	B = 83%-86%	B- = 80%-82%
C+ = 77%-79%	C = 73%-76%	C- = 70%-72%
D+ = 67%-69%	D = 63%-66%	D- = 60%-62%

### **In-Class PARTICIPATION**

Because this is a discussion and activity-based course, your active participation is essential. At a very minimum level, “participation” means attending class regularly, being on time, reading the assigned material before class, and being ready to engage in the class activities. Participation will be assessed a variety of ways throughout the semester including (but not limited to):

- In-class discussion and activities: You will be assessed on the quality and quantity of your participation in these activities and discussions.

### **CASE DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP**

**TWICE** during the course, you will be required small group in a discussion of a case study related to the chapter. The discussion should last 20 – 25 minutes, and the goal is to help your group members make connections between the concepts in the chapter and the events in the case study.

On the day you lead discussion, you should turn in a 1-page paper with an agenda, a one-paragraph summary of the events and major dilemmas in the case, and a list of questions you plan to ask.

Your questions Questions should be open-ended and designed to help your group members really analyze the events in the case in order to figure out how the group communicated, how they faced challenges, and what they did well/poorly that influenced the outcome of the group interaction. Do NOT simply rely on the questions at the back of each case. Those are more general discussion questions and do not focus specifically on the concepts from our textbook. At the end of the discussion, your group will be asked to share one key insight gained from your analysis of the case. Although this assignment requires group interaction, it is an individual assignment in that only the leader of the discussion is assessed.

*GRADING*: You are graded based on your ability to create a clear agenda for the discussion, write a concise summary of the case highlighting the major issues the group is dealing with, and lead a lively discussion. As a leader, you should take this discussion seriously. If I could see that your group is not engaged in a lively discussion, this would mean that you were not prepared.

**NOTE: EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO READ THE CASE STUDIES AND COME READY TO DISCUSS THEM. I WILL RANDOMLY CHECK TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE READING THE CASES. FAILURE TO READ THE CACES WILL AFFECT YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.**

**AS A DISCUSSION LEADER, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT MISSING YOUR DISCUSSION DAY WITHOUT A VALID EXCUSE IS AN AUTOMATIC ZERO ON THE ASSIGNMENT.**

### **EXAMS**

Examinations assess student comprehension of basic course material provided in the readings and class lecture/discussion. The exam format will consist of short answers, multiple-choice, and true-false items. CMST 2120 is a group-based course. As a result, the tests will consist of both an individual and cooperative group assessment

*Group Portion:* All group members will be given a copy of the exam, but only one copy will serve as the group's official answer sheet. All group members will receive the same score on the group portion of the exam. The Group Portion will count for 70% of the points on the exam. Any group member not present for the cooperative group exam or arriving after the exam has begun must take the cooperative version of the exam separately from the group, receiving whatever grade is earned (often significantly lower than the group score on the same exam).

*Individual Portion:* After completing the group exam, each person will be given an individual exam, which will be similar in format to the group exam. The Individual Portion will count for 30% of the points on your exam score.

We will have in-class exam review sessions with activities designed to help you synthesize materials prior to the exams. Because this is a group exam, it is highly recommended that you study together with your group. However, because there is an individual component to your exam, I also recommend that you do not simply divide up materials: all group members will be assessed on their knowledge of all of the material.

### **INDIVIDUAL PAPERS:**

You will also be responsible for two short writing assignments during the semester. Papers should be typed, double spaced, with 12-point font and normal (approx. 1 inch) margins. Papers should be clearly written, well organized, and free of grammar and spelling errors.

#### Paper 1: Skill Assessment and Goals (3 pages)

The purpose of this paper is to have you reflect on your own skill level in groups and set goals for your skill development this semester. Your paper should answer the questions below. You must use data to support your conclusions, especially for the first two questions.

1. What are my strengths as a group member?
2. What areas of my group interaction can I improve?
3. What three specific skill goals do I need to set to improve my group effectiveness?
4. What steps will I take to accomplish these goals? What help do I need from others?
5. How will I know when I accomplish these goals? What feedback will I get from others?

You may use examples from your past experience in groups as data to support the claims you make in your answers. However, you should also complete the following activities from the textbook and use them as evidence for your answers.

Ch. 2: *Skill builder: What Did You Say?* (p. 24)

Ch. 2: *Skill Builder: How Well Do You Listen?* (p. 37)

Ch. 5: *Mastering Group Skills: How Competent Are You?* (p. 109)

Ch. 5: *Mastering Group Skills: Determining Your Communicator Style* (p. 114)

#### Paper 2: Skill Analysis and Reflection (5 pages)

The purpose of the second paper assignment is to have you reflect on and critically analyze your own communication in your small group this semester. In your Analysis Paper you should

- Reflect on your experience leading your group's case study discussion (as described in the "Participation" section above)
- Revisit the skill goals that you set for yourself in the Assessment Paper
- Discuss the extent to which you reached these goals
- Describe what aspects of the group processes helped and/or hindered your skill development.

You must use specific course concepts and examples from your group interaction (meetings, projects, exams, etc.) throughout the semester to help describe your answer.

### **GROUP PROJECT**

You will be assigned to a small group of 4-6 students, and you will work with this group throughout the semester. The group project is designed for you to experience group decision making and teamwork through practical application. As a group, you will need to select a social problem for which to design a plan of action. I want you to focus on a problem related to our USU campus, Logan, or the Cache Valley. It is expected that the problem is within reason of your group's ability to develop an action-based plan that demonstrates effective problem-solving skills.

The group project involves both group-level and individual-level outcomes. All group members will receive the same grade for the group products (presentation, portfolio, etc.), but each member will receive an individual participation score, which is included in the point total for this assignment. All group members will provide an assessment of their own and each other's contributions to the group project. These peer assessments will inform the instructor's decisions about each group member's group project participation score.

We will devote some in-class time to group meetings, but you will also need to work on your group projects outside of regular class hours. If there are extreme situations such as a group member routinely missing meetings or failing to show up for the presentation, please work closely with the instructor to address these issues. In some cases, these situations will result in a point deduction for the non-contributing group member. A more specific assignment sheet will be provided in class.

### Tentative Course Schedule

This schedule provides an outline for our time together this semester. The schedule is displayed by week and day below. **\*\*Please note that this schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion based on the flow and content of our interactions. \*\***

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignments Due
1	Aug 28	Introduction to the Course		
	Aug 30 <sup>th</sup>	Group Guidelines Assigning Discussion Leaders		
	Sept 1 <sup>st</sup>	Introduce Group Project		
2	Sept 4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NO SCHOOL – LABOR DAY</b>		
	Sept 6 <sup>th</sup>	Basics of Group Communication	Textbook Ch.1	
	Sept 8 <sup>th</sup>	Your Communication in Groups	Textbook Ch. 2	Milestone #1
3	Sept 11 <sup>th</sup>	Managing Group Meetings	Textbook Ch. 11	
	Sept 13 <sup>th</sup>	Communication That Structures  <i>Assign Paper # 1</i>	Textbook Ch. 3	
	Sept 15 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case # 11</b>	Discussion Leadership <hr/>
4	Sept 18 <sup>th</sup>	Group Tasks and Activities	Textbook Ch. 4	
	Sept 20 <sup>th</sup>	Building Group Communication Competence	Textbook Ch. 5	
	Sept 22 <sup>nd</sup>		<b>Case # 14</b>	<u>Discussion Leadership</u>
5	Sept 25 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Paper # 1 Workshop</i>		
	Sept 27 <sup>th</sup>			Milestone #2
	Sept 29 <sup>th</sup>	Building Relationships in Groups	Textbook Ch. 6	Paper #1 Due
6	Oct 2 <sup>nd</sup>		<b>Case # 9</b>	Discussion Leadership <hr/>

	Oct 4 <sup>th</sup>			Milestone #3
	Oct 6 <sup>th</sup>	Solving Problems and Making Decisions	Textbook Ch. 7	
7	Oct 9 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case # 16</b>	Discussion Leadership _____
	Oct 11 <sup>th</sup>			Milestone #4
	Oct 13 <sup>th</sup>	Exam Review		
8	Oct 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Exam 1—Group Exam</b>		
	Oct 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Exam 1—Individual Exam</b>		
	Oct 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NO CLASS – FALL BREAK</b>		
9	Oct 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Making Observations and Giving Feedback	Textbook Ch. 12	
	Oct 25 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case # 18</b>	Discussion Leaderships
	Oct 27 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Assign Paper # 2</i>		Milestone # 5
10	Oct 30 <sup>th</sup>	Assessing Decision Processes	Textbook Ch. 8	
	Nov 1 <sup>st</sup>		<b>Case # 21</b>	Discussion Leadership _____
	Nov 3 <sup>rd</sup>			Milestone #6
11	Nov 6 <sup>th</sup>	Managing Conflict in Groups	Textbook Ch. 9	
	Nov 8 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Paper # 2 Workshop</i>		
	Nov 10 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case # 19</b>	Discussion Leadership _____
12	Nov 13 <sup>th</sup>			Milestone #7  Paper #2 due
	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case #20</b>	Discussion Leadership _____
	Nov 17 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case #22</b>	Discussion Leadership
13	Nov 20 <sup>th</sup>			Milestone #8

	Nov 22 <sup>nd</sup>			Discussion Leadership _____
	Nov 24 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Case # 10</b>	Milestone #9
14	Nov 27 <sup>th</sup>	Providing Leadership in Groups	Textbook Ch. 10	
	Nov 29 <sup>th</sup>	Group Work Time		
	Dec 1 <sup>st</sup>	Final Exam Review		
15	Dec 4 <sup>th</sup>	Final Project Presentations		All Final Projects Due
	Dec 6 <sup>th</sup>	Final Project Presentations		
	Dec 8 <sup>th</sup>	Final Project Presentations		
<b>Final Exam</b>	Dec 13 <sup>th</sup> @ 9:30 am			

**Final Exam: Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am - 11:20 am.** Students are required to take the exam at the time and place allotted for the final exam. We do not allow anyone to take the final before or after the final exam period unless they have a conflicting final exam and it is determined that final for this class should move per the school policies.