
COM 315: Small Group Communication

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” –Helen Keller–

*“Trust is knowing that when a team member does push you, they're doing it because they care about the team.”
–Patrick Lencioni–*

Course Overview

This course is designed to facilitate students’ learning of the theory and practice of small group communication. Through lectures, discussions, readings, exercises, and assignments, we will investigate several concepts related to group and team communication. Topics related to groups and teams include: systems, norms, roles, cohesiveness and groupthink, group development and team evolution, diversity, verbal and nonverbal communication, listening and feedback, decision making and problem solving, creativity, conflict management, leadership, and computer-mediated group communication.

The format of the course is designed so that you will have the opportunity to develop and **practice** your group communication skills. Therefore, the goal is to provide you with new perspectives on the process of small group communication, as well as increased options for communicating effectively in small groups. You will take part in student-facilitated discussion, group interaction and projects/presentations, lectures, and individual assignments. This course is driven by “self-initiated learning” enhanced by group interaction and personal reflection.

Course Goals

- To understand the key elements, processes, and complexities involved in interacting in a variety of small groups
- To apply small group communication theory to everyday situations
- To enhance your awareness of your own and others’ communication behaviors and their effects
- To develop your ability to critically analyze interactions within small groups
- To recognize the potential constraints and barriers to small group effectiveness
- To develop the ability to provide suggestions for aiding dysfunctional small groups and teams
- To learn how to motivate group members to contribute to the group’s cause
- To increase your analytical and interpersonal skills for communicating competently in small groups, including:
 - identifying issues and tensions within group life and developing strategies to manage them effectively
 - identifying and developing skills of leading within small groups
 - facilitating group discussions effectively
 - improving written, nonverbal, and verbal communication
 - sharpening your written expression of ideas and building your capacity for making strong arguments backed by evidence
 - constructing documents such as meeting agendas, professional emails and memos, and meeting minutes
- To further improve research skills: utilizing databases, understanding academic articles, analyzing arguments, and being able to synthesize information
- To inspire intellectual breadth and lifelong learning, increase inquiry and critical thinking, build communication skills, increase multicultural knowledge and awareness, and encourage citizenship and ethics.

By achieving these course goals, you also will work towards achieving several [Learning Objectives](#) for your BA in Communication Studies.

Required Materials

- Keyton, J. (2006). *Communicating in groups: Developing relationships for effective decision making* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Throughout the semester, supplemental readings (in addition to the text) are assigned. These readings are posted to Blackboard in the Course Documents tab.

Helpful Resources

- Textbook resources, quizzes, and more: <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195183436/>
- Library help in COM: <http://guides.library.unlv.edu/communicationstudies>
- APA style (6th ed.) manual or Purdue Owl: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

COURSE POLICIES

Classroom Expectations

- Arrive on time and prepared for class.
- Behave with academic integrity and honesty on all assignments.
- Complete assignments on or before the due date.
- Obtain missed class notes, assignment information, and course materials from classmates.
- Recognize and accept the consequences of your actions and choices.
- Actively participate in each class meeting. If you play on your computer, study for another class, send text messages, or disrespect another classmate or me, and so on, you will be asked to leave.
- Treat members of the class with the respect and dignity afforded to all persons in a just society. The nature of this course hinges on students being **open to not only examining, but also discussing** aspects of communication. Therefore, it is *crucial* that we remain open, both to expressing our viewpoints in thoughtful and appropriate language, and to considering the similar expression of others' perspectives.
- **You may NOT audio or video record class sessions without my prior approval, and all electronic devices must be turned OFF and PUT AWAY during class.*

I have high expectations for you (but not unreasonable ones), and I truly want you to succeed in the class. A large part of that success comes from engaging the material in critical and reflective ways. **Keep up with class readings and fully take part in class discussion, as readings and concepts discussed in class build upon and connect to previous days.** Participation and attendance is part of your grade (see Assignment section), so you should complete every assigned reading *before* class and come to class prepared to ask questions, discuss the material, and participate in activities. **Your group members depend on you too!**

Assignment of Groups

This is a group-based class, so you will be working in groups for the majority of the semester. Groups will be assigned randomly and **will not be altered for any reason.** One of the primary goals of the class is for you to be able to adapt to the sometimes challenging variables that can influence productivity and cohesion within groups. If you experience any difficulty or friction in your group at any point, my role will be to listen and provide consultation. **However, it is your responsibility to: 1) maintain a sense of cohesion and balance within the group and 2) to resolve conflicts or problems in order to complete the various projects throughout the semester.** Groups usually find that the sooner they address growing problems, the easier it is to resolve them in a professional manner. In other words, don't wait until the end of the semester to address any persistent issues.

Because you will spend a great deal of time working in your group, you will be given time during regular class meetings to work with your group on various projects. **However, you will also need to meet with your group outside of class (or via CMC) in order to complete assignments.** Missing group meetings during and outside of class will affect your group participation evaluation. Thus, I strongly suggest you make sure you will be able to faithfully attend class and actively participate in group meetings during/outside of class (or via CMC). **If your work/personal schedule conflicts with class attendance and your participation in the group outside of class, you should reconsider taking this class this semester. Again, your group members depend on you!**

Handing in Work and Due Dates

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the designated due date. **NO late assignments or make-up exams will be allowed except in extreme circumstances** (e.g., serious illness, death in the family, university recognized religious holidays, or university sponsored activities). You **MUST** notify me ahead of time when appropriate and/or provide appropriate documentation for your absence in these cases.

If an extreme emergency beyond your control prohibits you from attending class on a day that *an individual written assignment* is due, you may email me your assignment as an attachment BEFORE the start of class. Then, bring a hard copy of that assignment with you when you return to class.

All written assignments must be **typed** unless otherwise specified. Think about self-presentation and impression formation as you prepare your assignments. For formal assignments, use **APA format** for in-text citing and the reference page. Instructions for APA format are available on Blackboard under “APA Style.”

Communication with Instructor

Office Hours: I prefer face-to-face communication, and I strongly encourage you and/or your group to visit with me during my office hours if you have any questions, concerns, or difficulties with the course (or if you just want to chat!). I can’t help you if you don’t ask for help. However, again, know that when concerns are about group processes/functions, your group is largely responsible for finding resolution—that’s the point of the class. ☺

I am also MORE than happy to help you plan for your success in the course, brainstorm ideas, or look over any drafts of assignments. I do not look over drafts via email, so be sure to stop by my office hours to discuss assignments in depth. **If you know you “need” a certain grade in the class for various reasons, see me EARLY in the semester to help plan accordingly. By the end of the semester, final grades are final.*

Email: I check my email according to “business hours.” I usually check email Monday-Friday between 9am and 5pm. Therefore, if you would like a response to an email on the day you send it, send it on those days and before those times. I will ALWAYS respond to your emails, so if you have not heard a response from me after 48 hours, please resend the email (as this means I probably did not receive it for some reason).

Additionally, emails regarding the class are sent regularly through Blackboard; therefore, be sure that you also check your email frequently.

Rebelmail – By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students’ Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students’ e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu. **Emailing within WebCampus is acceptable.**

Blackboard/Webcampus

COM 315 has a Blackboard site on which you'll find a variety of resources including the course syllabus, assignment sheets, and links to helpful websites and handouts. Blackboard is used frequently for assignment clarifications and announcements, so be sure to check the site regularly. If you have ideas for content additions to this support site, please let me know.

Grade queries: 24/7 policy

I’m happy to discuss your performance with you. If you have a question/concern about grades, let me know after 24 hours of receiving the grade, and we’ll set up an appointment. In cases where you think a grade might not reflect your performance, please make your case in writing, using the criteria for evaluation, and bring that with you to the appointment. Grade queries must be made within a week of receiving the grade. **All grade discussions should be conducted face-to-face and are not allowed via email.*

Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution.

An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the *Student Academic Misconduct Policy* (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct>.

You must be familiar with these rules and regulations regarding academic integrity. Violations of the academic integrity code will result in **penalties in this course and all violations will be reported accordingly**. For this course, *academic misconduct* includes (but is not limited to) the following: **disruption** of classes; **threatening** an instructor or fellow student in an academic setting; **giving or receiving of unauthorized aid on exams or in the preparation of worksheets, papers, or other assignments**; knowingly **misrepresenting the source of any academic work**; **plagiarizing** of another's work; **sharing class materials** such as notes, study guides, and so forth with others in or outside the classroom; or otherwise acting dishonestly in research.

You are expected to work individually on individual assignments and to NOT seek outside assistance beyond the Writing Center, me, or without prior approval.

It is also extremely important that you avoid plagiarism in this course. More importantly, be very clear when you are quoting vs. paraphrasing sources. *The use of any uncited sources, using someone else's words or ideas without quoting, using falsified sources, or turning in work that is not yours and/or is not original for this course are serious offenses and will not be tolerated in this course. Claiming academic ignorance about standards for writing is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism committed.* If you have questions about what "counts" as plagiarism, please talk with me.

Plagiarism and other practices of academic misconduct will result in an "F" for the assignment and possibly the course, and will be reported for possible disciplinary action at the college and university levels.

As part of this course, you may be required to submit assignments to TurnItIn, a plagiarism detection system on Blackboard. This system compares your written work to other assignments from UNLV and universities across the nation, as well as the internet broadly. This system will also store your written work for comparison in order to prevent future plagiarism.

Finally, do not cheat on exams. Anyone seen using an electronic device or notes or "peeking" at others' exams will be asked to leave and will receive a grade of "0" for the exam.

Copyright: The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. **You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws.** Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright>.

Religious Holidays Policy

Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor **within the first 14 calendar days of the course** of their intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit:

<http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531>

Libraries

Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. For this class, the subject librarian is Susie Skarl (https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject). UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students' access to information. Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and for successful post-college life. Access library resources and ask questions at <https://www.library.unlv.edu/>.

Disability Resource Center (DRC)

The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, <http://drc.unlv.edu/>, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.

Incomplete Grades

The grade of I—Incomplete—can be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session but for reason(s) beyond the student's control, and acceptable to the instructor, cannot complete the last part of the course, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. The incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester for undergraduate courses. Graduate students receiving "I" grades in 500-, 600-, or 700-level courses have up to one calendar year to complete the work, at the discretion of the instructor. If course requirements are not completed within the time indicated, a grade of F will be recorded and the GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete do not register for the course but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the I grade. ***Please note that because the nature of this class is group-based, students must complete group assignments *with a group*, and group assignments cannot be completed individually.**

Transparency in Learning and Teaching: <https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning>
<https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency>

Tutoring and Coaching—The Academic Success Center: <http://www.unlv.edu/asc>

UNLV Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>

Assignment Schedule

The assignment schedule is subject to change. Please bring your schedule with you to class so that you can note any changes. Revisions to the schedule or individual assignments will be announced during regular class sessions and on Blackboard. The syllabus or assignments are subject to change—depending on how the class progresses. Also, depending on the direction the class takes discussions, additional readings may be posted to Blackboard as the semester progresses.

COURSE COMPONENTS AND GRADED WORK

Self-Analysis Paper (15 points)

For this assignment, you will complete a self-assessment survey of group communication skills and write a brief analysis paper (**3-4 pages**) about your current skills, areas for improvement, goals, and concerns regarding group work—incorporating supportive evidence from the textbook. A detailed assignment sheet and the self-assessment survey will be available on Blackboard.

2 Exams (Exam1=75 points; Exam2=75 points; 150 points total)

There will be two exams in this class. Material from the text, class lectures, and class activities are all fair game for exam questions. Exam questions can include multiple choice, true/false, matching, short answer, and essay questions. A review sheet will be provided prior to each exam. Please refer to the course schedule to see exam dates. **Missed exams result in grades of "0."**

Group Contract (40 points)

There are 3 parts to the group contract. First, you will create an individual contract and you will share this with your group. Second, as a group, you will develop a team name and logo. These should be spelled out in a “Group Contract” of your expectations and responsibilities within the group (20). As a group, you will need to determine how performance in the group will be evaluated (e.g., quantity &/or quality of work, attendance, and so on).

After signing the contract, each team member will be bound to the contract and groupwork grades will be based in part on peer evaluations in light of the specifications of the contract. Third, your group will present your contracts in class in a 6-8 minute presentation (20 points). We will discuss this assignment in detail in class, and an assignment sheet will be available on Blackboard.

In-Class Activities, Participation, and Attendance (20 points)

The nature of this course is such that your consistent and active involvement is required. This is not a course where you will simply sit back, blend in, and take notes. There will be times when the class decides what direction the discussion will take. Understanding small group communication, as well as creating productive interpersonal relationships within the class, entails your engaging with the course material, with me, and with other class members. Please bring your text(s) to class and be prepared to be actively involved in activities.

I will record attendance every class. While I realize there may be occasions when you find it necessary to be gone, or times when some other activity may take priority over class, I do expect you to exhibit a strong commitment to this learning group. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes and copies of handouts from classmates. While you are entitled to explain the circumstances for your absence to a scheduled class meeting, there is no such thing as an “excused absence.” Instead, your first two absences (defined as missing 30 or more minutes – start, end, or middle – of a class session) will not be penalized. EVERY absence starting with the 3rd will deduct points from your attendance grade.* As in the “real world,” sometimes we have to make decisions and prioritize when there are scheduling conflicts.

Typically, I do not like to give quizzes, but I will start giving unannounced quizzes if it appears the class is not keeping up with the readings. Additionally, throughout the semester, there are in-class activities that count towards your participation grade. The purpose of these activities is to learn more about yourself, your group, and group communication concepts.

*The following is a breakdown of the maximum attendance/participation grade available, given the indicated number of absences: **0-2=A, 3-4=B, 5-6=C, 7-8=D, 9=F**. Whereas attendance alone will not secure particular grades, absences will certainly reduce them. **Participation points based on in-class activities are figured into the equation after attendance reductions are recorded.** Additionally, depending on your group contract, there may be other penalties for absences.

Final Group Project—Task, Portfolio, & Presentation (175 points)

This project is designed to provide students with the opportunity to experience and analyze group processes from a communication perspective. First, your group will complete a task. Second, your group will complete a portfolio that critically analyzes your group processes—including the completion of the group task. Third, your group will present your task and group analysis to the class. Although parameters for the final *portfolio* will be provided on Blackboard, we will spend class time deliberating about the overall final *task* focus; thus, the class will ultimately choose the subject matter for the final project *task*. For this assignment, groups must first complete a task that satisfies any requirements set by the class. The completed project will also involve the production of a report that details your group processes, experiences, accomplishments, and lessons learned (100 points). Be sure to keep your group organized—part of fulfilling this assignment includes turning in meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and providing update memos to your instructor. The group will present their project results to the class (75 points). The final project is a large part of your grade, so make sure to help motivate your group to work consistently throughout the semester. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided on Blackboard.

COM 315 Tentative Course Schedule

(Subject to Change as Necessary)

All Supplemental Readings (SuppR) will be provided on Blackboard (Course Documents).

Day	Date	Topic	Assignments and Readings Due
Mon.	8/29	Course Overview Introductions	Syllabus
Wed.	8/31	What are Groups? The Basics The Bona Fide Group Perspective & Other Group Communication Perspectives/Theories	Keyton 1 SuppR – the SI Perspective
Mon.	9/5	Labor Day Recess!	Enjoy the day!
Wed.	9/7	Group Communication Perspectives Cont. Communication in Groups <i>*Discuss Self-Analysis Paper</i>	Keyton 2
Mon.	9/12	Communication in Groups Cont. Group Networks, Roles, and Development	Keyton 3 SuppR – Symbolic Convergence Theory
Wed.	9/14	Group Tasks and Activities Computer-Mediated Communication in Groups	Keyton 4 SuppR – CMC Complete Doodle Survey
Mon.	9/19	Building Group Communication Competence <i>*Discuss Group Contract</i> <i>*Final Group Project Overview</i> <i>*Discuss Final Reflection Paper</i>	Keyton 5 *Self-Analysis Paper Due
Wed.	9/21	Effective Group Meetings (Agendas and Minutes) <i>*Assignment of Groups</i>	Keyton 11 *Group Contract Part 1 Due
Mon.	9/26	Writing Professionally <i>*Group Brainstorming</i>	SuppR – Letters, Memos, Emails, Reports <i>*See links below</i>
Wed.	9/28	Group Presentations & Collaboration Exam 1 Review	Keyton pp. 292-300
Mon.	10/3	Exam 1	Exam 1
Wed.	10/5	Building Relationships	Keyton 6 SuppR – The Discipline of Teams SuppR – Emotions in Groups
Mon.	10/10	Let There Be Deliberation! Group Decision-Making	Keyton 7 & 8
Wed.	10/12	Deliberation Cont. Debriefing, Wrap-up, and Brainstorming <i>*Formally assign Group Project</i>	
Mon.	10/17	<i>In Class Work Day – Group Contracts</i>	
Wed.	10/19	Presidential Debate at UNLV! <i>No in-class session, but fulfill assignment. -></i>	Watch the Debate as a Group, Complete Group Work via CMC, or Out-of-Class Group Meetings <i>*Update Memo Emailed to JG by 5pm on Thursday</i>
Mon.	10/24	Group Contract Presentations	*Group Contracts Due
Wed.	10/26	Conflict in Groups	Keyton 9 SuppR – Conflict in Groups *Initial Peer Evaluations Due

Mon.	10/31	Conflict Continued Observation and Feedback	Keyton 12
Wed.	11/2	Leadership	Keyton 10 SuppR – Leadership and Followship
Mon.	11/7	Small Group Activism	SuppR
Wed.	11/9	Catch Up Exam 2 Review	
Mon.	11/14	EXAM 2	EXAM 2
Wed.	11/16	<i>Out of Class Work Day</i>	<i>*Update Memo Emailed to JG by 5pm on Thursday</i>
Mon.	11/21	<i>In Class Workday – Group Meetings w/JG *Assign Presentation Order</i>	
Wed.	11/23	<i>In Class Workday – Group Meetings w/JG</i>	
Mon.	11/28	<i>In Class Workday – Group Meetings w/JG</i>	
Wed.	11/30	Final Group Project Presentations	All Group Project Portfolios Due—Hard copy in Class & on Bb
Mon.	12/5	Final Group Project Presentations	
Wed.	12/7	Debriefing and Wrap Up	Final Group Evaluations Due

*There is no final exam for this course. Instead, you can bring your **Final Reflection Paper** to my office during our scheduled final exam time on **Wednesday, December 14** from **8am-10am** (See the full [final exam schedule](#).). (I will need to leave my office by 9:50am, so if I am not there, bring your paper to the main COM office BY 10am.) You can also turn your paper in early during my office hours on Monday or Tuesday.

***LINKS FOR 9/26:**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/624/01/>
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/624/02/>
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/1/>
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