

**COMMUNICATION 4635:  
SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION**

**Autumn 2013**

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This course is a survey of contemporary theory and research in small group communication. Given that communication is important to the quality of participatory decision making occurring in today's organizations and communities, this course focuses on the discussion and collaboration processes at work in successful small groups. The course is focused on three areas: (a) understanding empirical research on the properties of groups and group functioning; (b) understanding the role of communication practices in accomplishing the group tasks of leadership, influence and decision-making; and (c) understanding the advanced communication practices and interaction designs involved in group deliberation, collaboration and dialogue that are seen as key for handling the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges of communicating in a diverse world.

The course follows a logic developed by communication scholar Stan Deetz: "As a society we have a *moral* and *practical* commitment to some form of effective democracy. *Moral*: People have some meaningful right of choice on things that affect them and those dear to them. *Practical*: People collectively can make better long term decisions if they use interaction processes which embracing rather than suppressing difference and conflict. Not all forms and practices of democracy, however, accomplish either the moral or practical condition. Sustainable mutually beneficial decisions require an attention to the needs, goals, hopes, and aspirations of all parties and a process that helps them make decisions together. To obtain this requires interaction and decision processes that increase the *creativity* and *customization* of decisions and generate high level of *commitment* and *compliance* to them.

These are achieved by special inclusive, outcome focused, and innovative designed processes of interaction. Enacting these designs requires *capacity building* (What are the knowledge resources, practices and skills needed? Acquiring those skills.), *designed improvisations* (What are the systemic qualities of interactions that move groups from trained/skilled incapacities to trained/skilled innovation? ...), and *collaborative interaction* (What are the innovative processes that aid mutual decisions? Acquiring the ability to produce interaction processes where conflicts can become the engines of quality decisions.). Good interaction designs successfully deal with questions of space/place, inclusion, diversity, scalability, implementation, and assessment."

*Course Objectives: What you can learn and achieve*

- Develop your knowledge base about current theories and research of group processes and interaction.
- Enhance your toolkit for solving problems and making sound decisions with others.
- An increased understanding of how decision failures stem from both internal (small group dynamics) and external (political-economic-cultural) factors.
- Develop leadership skills to facilitate group decisions that are unlikely to generate unexpected or undesirable outcomes.
- Establish deliberative group decision making processes that work in organizations or communities.
- Explore common group communication challenges and potential solutions.
- Frame complex issues using structured decision-making models.
- Implement collaborative decision-making models effectively.
- Explore processes of collaboration to manage various types of conflict.
- Develop capacity to engage in dialogue and build agreements with key stakeholders.

**Texts**

Forsyth, D. R. (2010). *Group Dynamics* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

***Selected Readings will be distributed from:***

Gray, B. (1989). *Collaborating: Finding common ground for multiparty problems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Harrington-Mackin, D. (1994). *The team building tool kit: Tips, tactics and rules for effective workplace teams*. New York: American Management Association.

LaFasto, F., & Larson, C. (2002). *When teams work best: 6,000 team members and leaders tell what it takes to succeed*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Forester, J. (2009). *Dealing with differences: Dramas of mediating public disputes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Deetz, S. (1995). *Transforming communication, transforming business: Building responsive and responsible workplaces*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Fisher, I., & Ury, W. (1981). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Carcasson, M. (2009). *Beginning with the end in mind: A call for goal-driven deliberative practice*. Publish Agenda publication.  
[http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/PA\\_CAPE\\_Paper2\\_Beginning\\_SinglePgs\\_Rev.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/PA_CAPE_Paper2_Beginning_SinglePgs_Rev.pdf).

Ury, W. (1999). *Getting to peace: Transforming conflict at home, at work, and in the world*. New York: Penguin Books.

## Course Activities

Examinations. Students are required to take three examinations covering the content of the course. These examinations will consist of multiple choice and short essay items. Each examination will count **20%** toward the final grade in the course.

Small group analyses. Students will be asked to complete several short homework or in-class individual or group assignments, distributed throughout the course. Complete written specifications will be given for each assignment, which are designed to facilitate mastery of course concepts and skill in analyzing group communication. These short analyses, along with class participation, will count **20%** toward the final grade in the course.

Group produced assignments. Students are asked to participate in a team that will gain experience in small group interaction by participating in several exercises. Complete instructions will be given in a separate handout. Group work will count **20%** toward the final grade in the course.

### To help you master the reading and lecture material:

1. Every reading will have a set of study guide questions available on the course website and/or distributed in class.
2. For some topics a few other readings or case studies will be assigned that will amplify or illustrate course concepts. These materials will be available on the course website.

## Course Policies

Scholarly Expectations. This course is a continuation of material covered in other Communication courses. We will endeavor to extend and deepen our understanding of communication processes and practices in small groups. Students who are motivated to learn more about small group communication are most likely to be successful in this course. There is a **substantial** amount of reading and writing to do, so students are advised to take careful notes during class.

Participation. Naturally, students are responsible for attending class and participating in class discussion.

Class etiquette: We ask that you focus on this course during our class sessions. Anyone texting, face-booking and using computers to write assignments for other classes will be asked to leave class for that class period.

Scholarly Integrity. Students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge with honor and credibility. Plagiarism of any kind on examinations or written assignments will not be tolerated. If you are caught plagiarizing you will be prosecuted through appropriate University channels.

**This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking available assistance in a timely manner.**

## Communication 4635

## TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

Session	Day	Date	Topic and Reading
1	Thurs	8/22	Overview of Course
			<b>Group Properties</b>
2	Tues	8/27	The Nature of Small Groups Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 1
3	Thurs	8/29	Group Formation Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 3 (to p. 76), Chapter 4
4	Tues	9/3	Group Cohesion and Development Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 5
5	Thurs	9/5	Group Structure and Socialization Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 6
6	Tues	9/10	Topic: Group Structure and Socialization, continued/Review
7	Thurs	9/12	<b>Examination #1</b>
			<b>Group Interaction Processes</b>
8	Tues	9/17	Influence Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 7, Chapter 8 on conformity
9	Thurs	9/19	Influence, cont.
10	Tues	9/24	Leadership Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 9
11	Thurs	9/26	Leadership, cont.
12	Tues	10/1	Performance Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 10
13	Thurs	10/3	Decision-Making Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 11
14	Tues	10/8	Decision-making, cont./Review
15	Thurs	10/10	<b>Examination #2</b>
			<b>Interaction Designs and Communication Practices in Deliberation, Collaboration &amp; Dialogue</b>
16	Tues	10/15	Growth of collaboration in corporate governance: Teams Reading: Forsyth, Chapter 12; Harrington-Mackin; Lacosta & Larson
17	Thurs	10/17	Liberal democracy, informed publics, and deliberative practice Reading: Carcasson; Barge
18	Tues	10/22	Conflict Forsyth, Chapter 13; Forester; Fisher & Ury
19	Thurs	10/24	Introduction to collaboration Reading: Gray
20	Tues	10/29	Processes of collaboration
21	Thurs	10/31	Reciprocity and Dialogue; Doing dialogue Reading: Cooperrider & Whitney
22	Tues	11/5	Transforming conflicts Reading: Ury, Gray

23	Thurs	11/7	Group Presentations
24	Tues	11/12	Group Presentations
25	Thurs	11/14	Group Presentations
26	Tues	11/19	Group Presentations/Review
27	Thurs	11/21	No formal class: National Communication Association Conference
28	Tues	11/27	<b>Examination #3</b>
29	Thurs	11/28	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
30	Tues	12/3	Group Presentations & Course finish