

COM320: Small Group Communication
Spring 2010
Purdue University, West Lafayette
Department of Communication
Tuesday / Thursday 9:00 – 10:15 a.m.
Beering Hall, 2291

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Office Hours:	Thursday 11 a.m.-1 p.m., and by appt.

Course Description

When was your last committee or group meeting? The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2003) estimates the number of meetings held per day in the U.S. at more than 25 million, and many executives spend as much as 40-50% of their professional time in meetings (Monge, McSween, & Wyer, 1989). In fact, meetings play a key role in today's world of business and politics, in which many decisions are formed by work teams and committees. Yet, meetings often have a bad reputation. "Meeting's over, let's get back to work"—who has not heard or made such a comment at the end of a session? Participants in meetings often report that too much of the time during their meetings is wasted. Typical complaints include that meetings are often called in with too short notice, that they last too long, and too often end without concrete results (Romano & Nunamaker, 2001).

The overarching aim of our class is to gain a better understanding of how groups and teams function. What factors affect communication in groups? What are the possibilities—and pitfalls—of teamwork? How can communication and decision-making processes in groups be improved? We will survey theories and concepts from diverse areas in communication and psychology that can help us better understand group interactions and discussions. Topics include the structures of groups and group tasks, social identity and group cohesion, groupthink, information aggregation rules, group diversity and information sharing, majority and minority influences, leadership and authority, transactive memory and metacognition in groups, and motivational issues. Readings combine classic approaches and theories with recent findings in group research. A final session is devoted to the discussion of new directions in research on interacting groups.

Course Objectives

1. To foster understanding, critique, analysis, and integration of recent theory and research related to group processes;
2. To encourage the application of group research in order to explain and understand the role of communication in everyday group situations; and
3. To develop and practice skills related to collaborative group work.

Readings

a) Textbook

Forsyth, D. R. (2010). *Group dynamics*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

b) Additional Readings

Required readings are marked by an asterisk. All marked readings will be available on class Blackboard. Instructions on how to access Blackboard will be distributed in class. Unmarked readings (i.e., readings that might be of interest to you but are not required) can be borrowed from the library or from your instructor.

- Baron, R. S., Kerr, N. L., & Miller, N. (1992). *Group process, group decision, group action*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bonito, J. A. (2007). A local model of information sharing in small groups. *Communication Theory, 17*, 252–280.
- Boster, F. J., & Cruz, M. G. (2002). Persuading in the small group context. In J. P. Dillard & M. Pfau (Eds.), *The persuasion handbook: Developments in theory and practice* (pp. 477–494). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- *Brandon, D. P., & Hollingshead, A. B. (2004). Transactive memory systems in organizations: Matching tasks, expertise and people. *Organization Science, 15*, 633–644.
- *Connaughton, S. L., & Shuffler, M. (2007). Multinational and multicultural distributed teams: A review and future agenda. *Small Group Research, 38*, 387–412.
- Cruz, M. G., Boster, F. J., & Rodriguez, J. I. (1997). The impact of group size and proportion of shared information on the exchange and integration of information in groups. *Communication Research, 24*, 291–313.
- Frey, L. R., Gouran, D. S., & Poole, M. S. (Eds.). (1999). *The handbook of group communication theory & research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Gouran, D. S., & Hirokawa, R. Y. (1983). The role of communication in decision-making groups: A functional perspective. In M. S. Mander (Ed.), *Communication in transition: Issues and debates in current research* (pp. 168–185). New York: Praeger.
- Gouran, D. S., Hirokawa, R. Y., Julian, K. M., & Leatham, G. B. (1993). The evolution and current status of the functional perspective on communication in decision-making and problem-solving groups. *Communication Yearbook, 16*, 573–600.
- Henningsen, D. D., & Henningsen, M. L. M. (2004). The effect of individual difference variables on information sharing in decision-making groups. *Human Communication Research, 30*, 540–555.
- Hinsz, V. B., Tindale, R. S., & Vollrath, D. A. (1997). The emerging conceptualization of groups as information processors. *Psychological Bulletin, 121*, 43–64.
- Hirokawa, R. Y., & Poole, M. S. (Eds.). (1996). *Communication and group decision making*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- *Hollingshead, A. B., & Brandon, D. P. (2003). Potential benefits of communication in transactive memory systems. *Human Communication Research, 29*, 607–615.
- *Kerr, N. L., Messé, L. M., Seok, D., Sambolec, E., Lount, R. M., & Park, E. S. (2007). Psychological mechanisms underlying the Köhler motivation gain. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 828–841.
- Kerr, N. L., & Tindale, R. S. (2004). Group performance and decision making. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55*, 623–655.
- McGrath, J. E. (1984). *Groups: Interaction and performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McGrath, J. E., & Hollingshead, A. B. (1994). *Groups interacting with technology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Monge, P. R., McSween, C., & Wyer, J. A. (1989). A profile of meetings in corporate America: Results of the 3M meeting effectiveness study. *Annenberg School of Communication*.
- Moreland, R. L., & Myaskovsky, L. (2000). Explaining the performance benefits of group training: Transactive memory or improved communication? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 82, 117–133.
- *Paulus, P. B., & Nijstad, B. A. (Eds.) (2003). *Group creativity: Innovation through collaboration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Chapters 5 and 6.)
- Poole, M. S., & Hollingshead, A. B. (Eds.) (2005). *Theories of small groups*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Reimer, T., Bornstein, A.-L., & Opwis, K. (2005). Positive and negative transfer effects in groups. In T. Betsch & S. Haberstroh (Eds.), *The routine of decision making* (pp. 175–192). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Reimer, T., & Katsikopoulos, K. (2004). The use of recognition in group decision-making. *Cognitive Science*, 28, 1009–1029.
- *Reimer, T., Kuendig, S., Hoffrage, U., Park, E., & Hinsz, V. (2007). Effects of the information environment on group discussions and decisions in the hidden-profile paradigm. *Communication Monographs*, 74, 1–28.
- Reimer, T., Reimer, A., & Czienskowski, U. (in press). Decision-making groups attenuate the discussion bias in favor of shared information: A meta-analysis. *Communication Monographs*.
- Russo, J. E., & Schoemaker, P. J. H. (2002). *Winning decisions*. New York: Doubleday.
- Surowiecki, J. (2004). *The wisdom of crowds*. New York: Doubleday.
- Winkvist, J. R., & Larson, J. R. (1998). Information pooling: When it impacts group decision making. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 371–377.
- *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, 286–310.

Grading

Assignment	Maximum Points
Your best exam	60
Your second best exam	60
Individual paper	60
Group project I	40
Group project II	60
Class activities	20
(Extra credits for attendance (4 pts.) and participation in research studies (6 pts.))	max. 10
OVERALL (extra credits excluded)	300

Total possible points for the semester = 300 points.

The student's final course grade will be computed by dividing the total number of points earned by the total number of possible points (300) and multiplying by 100 to obtain a percentage of points earned. The final course grade will then be assigned according to the following grading scale: A+ (98-100%); A (93-97%); A- (90-92%); B+ (88-89%); B (83-87%); B- (80-82%); C+ (78-79%); C (73-77%); C- (70-72%); D+ (68-69%); D (63-67%); D- (60-62%); F (below 60%).

Course Requirements and Policies

a) Tests

There will be two exams during the semester and one final exam. Exams will cover the reading assignments, handouts, lectures, class discussions, demonstrations, and audio-visual materials used in class. Generally, exams will include multiple choice, fill in the gaps, short answer as well as some essay questions. Although there will be *three* exams, only your *best two exams* will count toward your final grade. *Do not intentionally miss one of the first two exams!* You may end up with an exam score that is unsatisfactory and cannot be dropped. However, if you are pleased with your performance on the first two exams, you may opt not to take the final exam. Make-up exams are *only* available in case of excused absences, which have to be provided in advance (in case of religious holidays or athletic events) or within three days after returning to class (in case of documented illness). If you miss one of the first two exams without a legitimate excuse or you choose not to take the final exam because you are pleased with the results of your first two exams, you will end up with two exam grades, both of which will count toward your final grade. If you take all *three* exams, only the *best two* exams will count toward your final grade.

b) Individual Paper

Students are required to write an individual paper (see *Grading*). The individual paper should be a short (700 to 1000 words long) introduction of a theory, concept, phenomenon, or approach of group communication. The layout of the paper should draw upon the “Contributor Guidelines” of the “Encyclopedia of Social Psychology.” An adapted guideline will be distributed in advance.

c) Group Projects: Process Losses and Assembly Bonus Effects in Groups

Students will work in groups of four on two group projects during the semester. Research on teams indicates that groups have their characteristic strengths, but they also have predictable weaknesses: while, on average, teams make better decisions than individuals, some of the absolute worst decisions are also made by groups (Russo & Shoemaker, 2002). The two projects deal with these two sides of groups and teams—their potentials and their pitfalls. Whereas the aim of the first project is to demonstrate a process loss, the aim of the second project is to identify strategies that can improve group functioning. Details on the group tasks and the related assignments (group presentations, handouts, paper) will be provided in the third week of class when groups will be formed.

d) Participation / Class Activities

Students are expected to: 1) read the assigned chapters and articles before class; 2) come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignments; and 3) actively participate in the class (e.g., respond to questions and comments posed by others, ask questions about the readings). Participating in class does not just mean talking. Good class participation involves volunteering answers to questions that are insightful, actively listening to others' contributions to discussion, and moving the discussion along toward a shared understanding. There will be three assignments related to in-class activities, which will be worth 20 points.

e) Attendance and Due Dates

There are four legitimate excuses for missing class: illness; religious observance; participation in University activities at the request of University authorities; or compelling circumstances beyond the student's control. These are the *only* circumstances under which you will be allowed to reschedule an assignment due date or an exam. If your absence is due to any of the four types of excused absences listed above you must provide a letter signed by a person in a position to make

authoritative determination regarding the validity of the cause of absence (e.g., a doctor in case of illness, university officials regarding campus activities).

Permission to turn in a late assignment will be granted *only* if requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. In the case of an emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as physically possible or you will earn no points for this assignment. Documentation has to be provided no later than three days after returning to class.

Policy on grade appeals: Any appeals must be submitted in writing, within 7 days after the assignment/exam has been returned. My decision regarding your appeal is non-negotiable.

f) Extra Credit Points (maximum: 10 pts.)

Students will earn four extra credit points if they actively participate in class discussions and activities throughout the semester and do not miss more than two classes. Students who miss three classes without a legitimate excuse can earn two extra credit points. No extra credit points for class participation will be awarded to students who are absent from four or more classes or to students who do not actively contribute to class discussions. As a general rule, assignments and tests can only be made up if a student has a legitimate excuse for the day on which the assignment was due (see *Attendance and Due Dates*).

In addition, students can earn up to six extra credit points (2% of 300 points) for participating in empirical studies (1/2% for each 30 minutes). The Department of Communication is using an online program that expedites the process of recruiting, signing up, and granting extra credit to students for participating in research studies. The program is called the *Research Participation System*, and it provides an easy online method for students to sign up for research studies, to keep track of the studies they have completed, and to view how many credits they have earned for each study. Students can access the system online at any time, from any computer with a standard web browser. By participating in studies done within the Department of Communication, students can learn first-hand how a study is conducted, they can contribute to the advancement of the field, and they can improve their grade by earning extra credit (see http://www.cla.purdue.edu/communication/Research/rps_students.html).

g) Academic Integrity

The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. The failure of any student to meet these standards may result in suspension or expulsion from the university and/or other sanctions including an “F” in the course (based on instructor and university discretion in consideration of the violation). Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating such activities. Papers submitted for credit in other classes may *not* be submitted for credit in this course. The university academic integrity policies are included in the *Student Code of Honor* section of the *University Regulations* handbook. In all cases, academic integrity violations will be reported to university officials.

h) Special Needs

Anyone that needs special considerations (i.e., student athletes for practices, games, travel, etc.) must have their schedule approved by the professor by the third class session. In addition, any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities.

Tentative Schedule

You are fully responsible for all information in the syllabus, including changes that will be introduced in class throughout the semester. In addition, all relevant pieces of information (including this syllabus, announcements, task assignments, and due dates), will be posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check Blackboard regularly to stay informed.

This schedule is tentative, and is subject to change if the instructor deems it necessary.

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	WHAT IS DUE?
Jan 12	Introduction to Class – <i>“The potentials and pitfalls of teams”</i>	Syllabus	
Jan 14 & 19	Group Diversity and Information Sharing in Groups – <i>“I know something that you don’t know”</i> & Introduction of Blackboard	F11 (313-332) & 12 (363-366); P&N 5; W; R	
Jan 21, 26, & 28	The Structures of Groups and Group Tasks – <i>“A group, what’s that?”</i> & Introduction of Group Assignments	F1 & 10	Profiles in Blackboard
Feb 2 & 4	Social Identity and Group Cohesion – <i>“I am because ... I am a member”</i>	F3 (57-65; 76-83) & 14 (411, 421- 438)	Preferences for Project Groups
Feb 9	<i>Reserved for group projects / questions regarding the exam</i>		Individual Paper
Feb 11	Groupthink – <i>“When everything goes wrong”</i>	F10 (293-304) & 11 (332-350)	
Feb 16	First Exam		First Exam
Feb 18	Social Combination and Social Communication Rules – <i>“Let’s vote—or shall we discuss this?”</i>	F11 (321-325)	
Feb 23 & 25	Majority and Minority Influences – <i>“David and Goliath”</i>	F7	Assignment Group Project I
Mar 2 & 4	GROUP PROJECT I Process Losses in Groups		Group Presentation I
Mar 9	Brainstorming in Groups – <i>“What if we are unable to find a solution?”</i>	F10 (282-292; 303- 309); P&N 6	
Mar 11	Transactive Memory and Metacognition in Groups – <i>“Who knows what and who knows what is known by whom?”</i>	B; H	
Mar 16 & 18	NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK		
Mar 23	<i>Reserved for group projects</i>		
Mar 25	March of the Penguins – <i>“Teamwork in the wild”</i>		
Mar 30 & Apr 1	Motivation Gains and Losses in Groups – <i>“Many hands make light work”</i>	K, F10 (282-304)	
Apr 6 & 8	Authority and Power – <i>“Follow the expert”</i>	F8	
Apr 13	Second Exam		Second Exam
Apr 15 & 20	Leadership Issues – <i>“Wanna be the liked or the successful boss?—You want to be both?”</i>	F9, CS	Assignment Group Project II
Apr 22, 27, & 29	GROUP PROJECT II Assembly Bonus Effects in Groups		Group Presentation II
TBA	Third Exam (Final Exam)		Third Exam

Abbreviations: **B**=Brandon & Hollingshead; **CS**=Connaughton & Shuffler; **F**=Forsyth; **H**=Hollingshead & Brandon; **K**=Kerr, Messé, Seok, Sambolec, Lount, & Park; **P&N**=Paulus and Nijstad; **R**=Reimer, Kuendig, Hoffrage, Park, & Hinsz; **W**=Wittenbaum, Hollingshead, & Botero;