

# DePaul University

## School for New Learning

### HC 276 Decision Making and Leadership in Small Group Communication

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Monday 6:00-9:00 p.m.

#### INTRODUCTION:

Humans have an inherent social nature. Our lives are filled with membership in a variety of groups from birth until death. Groups, in fact, are the basic building blocks of human existence. Like it or not, working in groups is an unavoidable part of life; collaboration is the way almost everything happens today. Our private and work lives put us in many groups, each with a distinct purpose and operating method. Study and support groups, task forces, management teams, focus groups, creative teams, and governance committees are just few examples of the many groups in which we can expect to participate. Functioning effectively, cooperative groups can outperform individuals working alone. Functioning poorly, the group experience can leave participants complaining that meetings are a waste of time, accomplish little, encourage too much buck passing, and often force participants to compromise too much.

This course will examine how communication develops and is sustained within small groups and teams, the dimensions of group character and the effects of group character on communication. The course will be a mix of theory and practice. Along with the required textbook, we will analyze case studies and participate in group decision-making exercises in the class. Upon completion of this course, students will have a working knowledge of:

1. The importance of creating clear goals that all group members can believe in and support.
2. The role that clear communication of ideas plays in small group endeavors.
3. The ways in which group members can share in leadership responsibilities.
4. The ways in which we are influenced by and influence group members.
5. The importance of matching decision-making procedures to the situation.
6. The role controversy plays in promoting creative problem solving and decision making.

7. The necessity for group members to face conflicts and resolve them in a constructive way.

COMPETENCIES: Students will be able to:

FX: write a complete paragraph defining the unique aspects of small group communication as well as explain and demonstrate how common small group communication problems can be avoided and/or corrected. An eight to ten page, double-spaced paper will meet this requirement.

H-3-D: demonstrate a mastery of both theory and practice of small group communication in the mediation of disputes which have resulted in poor group performance. An eight to ten page, double-spaced paper drawing on textbook and life experience will meet this requirement.

H-2-X: learn collaboratively and examine the skills, knowledge and values that contribute to such learning. In an eight to ten page, double-spaced paper, students will be asked to describe and analyze their group decision-making experiences during our weekly small group communication exercises as well as professional experiences the student may have had.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Shawn M. Burns, *Groups Theory and Practice*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2004, Thompson Publishing.

INSTRUCTOR'S BIOGRAPH: Robert Mills holds an M.A. degree in Communication Studies from Indiana University and a Ph.D. degree in Communication Studies from The University of Michigan. In addition to teaching courses at DePaul University he works as a consultant specializing in interpersonal, team and corporate communication problem analysis.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES and ASSESSMENT: Along with the required reading and discussion, during which students will be encouraged to share experiences of their own, the class will participate in weekly group activities. Class participation in these weekly in-class small group communication exercises will count for 30% of the total assessment. The final paper(s) will count for 50%. (*Competence papers will be due in the ninth week of class and will be graded and returned to the students in the tenth week of class.*) Also, two, short self-assessment quizzes will be given during the quarter covering material in the textbook and the lectures. These are designed to help students keep up with their reading and provide feedback to

the student about his/her understanding of the textbook material. Each of these quizzes will count for 10% of the total assessment. At all times throughout the quarter I will strive to ensure that my assessment of and feedback about student performance is as clear, honest and complete as I can make it. Since no two students are exactly alike, I will work to be as flexible and understanding as I can of the challenges facing individual students.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT: Written work will be evaluated as follows:

1. A grade of "A" designates work of high quality; reflects thorough and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand; reflects a clearly identifiable thesis and argument that demonstrates cogent and creative development and support of ideas.
2. A grade of "B" designates work of good quality; reflects clearly organized and comprehensive understanding of issues at hand; presents substantive thesis and argument with evident development and support of ideas.
3. A grade of "C" designates work that minimally meets requirements set forward in the assignment; reflects some organization and development of ideas but develops argument in superficial or simplistic manner; may only address part of the assignment or be otherwise incomplete.
4. A grade of "D" designates work of poor quality, which does not meet minimum requirements set forth in the assignment; demonstrates poor organization of ideas and/or inattention to development of ideas, grammar, and spelling. Treatment of material is superficial and/or simplistic; it may indicate that student has not done reading assignment thoroughly.

PLEASE NOTE:

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disk, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment, which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency {as well as} (d) the paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement." Plagiarism will result in a failure of the assignment or possibly the course. If you are unsure how to cite a source, please ask your instructor, consult a style manual or visit the Writing Center.

COURSE SCHEDULE (by week):

June 15: Chapter 1 "Introduction to Group Dynamics"

Small group exercise/discussion

June 22: Chapter 3 "Norms and Roles in Groups"

Small group exercise/discussion

June 29: Chapter 4 "Status & Power Dynamics in Groups"

Small group exercise/discussion

July 6: Chapter 5 "Communication in Groups"

Small group exercise/discussion

July 13: Chapter 6 "Group Development"

Small group exercise/discussion

July 20: Self-assessment quiz # 1 (Burns, chapters 1,3,4,5,&6

Chapter 7 "Understanding and Managing Conflict"

Small group exercise/discussion

July 27: Chapter 9 "Group Productivity"

Small group exercise/discussion

Aug. 3: Chapter 10 "Leadership"  
Chapter 11 "Group Decision Making"  
Small group exercise/discussion

Aug. 10: Chapter 11 "Teams"  
Small group exercise/discussion

**ALL COMPETENCE PAPERS DUE TODAY**

Review for self-assessment quiz # 2

Aug. 17: Return of graded competence papers  
Self-assessment quiz # 2 (chapters 7,9,10,11,&12)

PLEASE NOTE:

- A grade of incomplete is not automatically submitted for unfinished course work. To obtain an "I" grade in this course a written contract between student and instructor must be negotiated prior to the ninth week of class. This contract must contain a clear deadline by which time outstanding course work is to be completed and submitted. Failure to submit by this specified deadline will result in an automatic grade change from "I" to "F" for the competence. The contract is available on line at the SNL web page under "forms". Generally students have a maximum of two quarters to complete their work outstanding.
- As noted above, this course will follow the university policies regarding plagiarism.
- Students wishing to take this course pass/fail should let me know at the beginning of the course. Once committed to taking a course P/F a student cannot switch back to a letter grade.
- Attendance at all ten class sessions is recommended. If you foresee a problem with attendance please discuss it with me before hand. More than two absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

