

**COMX 210: Small Group Communication**  
**Spring 2015**  
**Dr. Betsy Wackernagel Bach**  
**University of Montana**

**TEXTBOOK:**

Beebe, S.A., & Masterson, J. T. (2015). *Communicating in small groups: Principles and practices* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

**COURSE PURPOSE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

We are collaborative by nature and many of the tasks we much accomplish in life are done in small groups. Information learned in this course will allow you to participate more effectively in a number of group settings. As such, students should be able to do the following upon completion of this course:

1. Articulate the difference between groups and teams along with the advantages and disadvantages of working in small groups;
2. Compare and contrast the various theories of small group communication along with their practical application to small group behavior;
3. Discuss the reasons people engage in groups;
4. Describe the concepts of group norms, trust, collaboration, and culture;
5. Demonstrate defensive and supportive group communication;
6. Articulate the ways in which groups manage conflict;
7. Compare and contrast various decision-making and problem-solving strategies for small groups;
8. Discuss how creativity in groups and teams might be enhanced;
9. Compare and contrast small group leadership styles;
10. Examine one's own participation in groups and to experiment with and improve upon those behaviors; and
11. Provide observational and evaluative skills in the small group behavior of others.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Exam #1	75 points	(15%)
Exam #2	75 points	(15%)
Paper #1	75 points	(15%)
Paper #2	175 points	(35%)
Paper #2 Presentation	25 points	(5%)
Participation	75 points	(15%)

**TOTAL**                      **500 points**

### ***Paper #1: Profile of Your Group Communication Style***

**Rationale:** The assignment of this project assumes that there is value in self-reflection by taking stock of the communication behavior of members in your group, and focusing on your role in creating group behavior, when appropriate. By looking at the behavior of your own group, you will get both practice in and insight to observe the communication behavior of those in other groups.

**Procedures:** You will keep a log of your participation in at least 5 group sessions. You should focus upon your own behavior and its impact on the entire group. You are then to write a paper where you *observe and report* what is happening in your group, and respond to each of the five questions below, by discussing what you have observed in light of the theories that you've read about and discussed in class.

**Task:** You are to write a 4-5-page paper analyzing communication behavior in your small group, and attach your observation notes at the end of your paper. Use 12 point Times New Roman font and double spacing. Answer the following questions:

1. Identify the task, social and individual roles in your group, focusing specifically on **your** roles. What have others said to you that lead you to make this claim? How well do your roles work in your group?
2. Identify one implicit and one explicit norm in your group. Provide examples of how these norms are communicated and enforced. Again, what do people say and do?
3. Identify the type of power you exhibit in your group, and using specific examples of your communication behavior to explain it.
4. What do you perceive to be your group's strengths and weaknesses?
5. At this point, what might you do to become a more effective and competent communicator in your group?

### ***Paper #2: Group Observation Project***

**Rationale:** The assignment of this project assumes that there is value in applying the theories and concepts learned in this class to naturalistic observation of small group communication. There are 3 parts to this project.

**Part #1--Preparation:** You and your team members are to observe and analyze the processes of an on-going task group in a real-world context, preferably a non-profit group. The goal of this project is to allow you to see real groups in action by gathering both observational and survey data to understand communication in small groups. Please do the following:

1. Find a group. This is often the most difficult part of the project. It is important to begin early and to get the group in place by mid-term so that you can observe *at least* six meetings. The best groups to observe are those that meet on a weekly basis and consist of no more than 8-10 members.

2. Obtain my approval to observe the group. You may choose a group from a Greek organization, a religious group, citizen's action committee, local board of directors, university task force, etc. Any task oriented group involved in decision-making and/or problem solving is acceptable.
3. Secure permission from the group leader to observe the group. Please get this permission in writing. Permissions are due to me by \_\_\_\_\_. The most complete permissions include informing the group a) the purpose of your observations, b) asking to collect survey data from group members, and c) informing the group that you will provide them with an "Executive Summary" of their group process as thanks for allowing you to observe. Please write this out formally and ask your contact person to sign this. Make a copy for both yourselves and the contact person.
4. Determine how you will observe the group. It is best if no more than three of you observe at any given meeting. ***You must spent at least 4 hours per person in observation.***
5. Select four survey instruments to use with the group to enhance your observations. Use either the surveys posted on the course Moodle site, the surveys listed at the end of each chapter of the text, or any one of the surveys used in class. Select one survey to assess each of the following:
  - a. interaction of group members;
  - b. leadership;
  - c. group effectiveness/productivity;
  - d. group decision making and problem solving.
6. Prepare a short report (the Executive Summary) for the group where you identify and discuss the results of the surveys and your observations and the suggestions you have for improving the group's process. We will discuss how to write an Executive Summary during class.
7. Write your group a thank you note upon completion of your project and include it with the Executive Summary that you send to the group.

## **Part #2 --Write the Paper**

Each group is to prepare a 15-20 page paper in which you provide the following information:

1. *A brief history of the group.* What is the group's purpose and charge as a decision-making group? How did you come to observe them? Identify the group members and their organizational (not their small group) roles (chair, treasurer, etc.). A simple chart works best to convey this information.
2. *The procedures used.* How did you observe the group? In dyads? Threes? Where did you sit in relation to the group? How often did you observe and over what period of time did you observe? How many total hours did you spend in observation? What did you look for, etc.?
3. *The surveys used.* What four survey instruments did you use for your analysis? Why did you select the surveys you did?

4. *Results.* Report the results of your observations and survey data for each of the four areas that you surveyed. Tabulate the data from each survey and report what you found.

5. *Interpret the survey results.* Use both your observations and survey results to discuss the group's communication in each of the four areas. For example, if you used the T-P Leadership Questionnaire, explain what you learned from the data in light of the small group leadership theories discussed in Chapter 9. If you used the Interaction Diagram in chapter 6, interpret that you found as it relates to the climate fostered by group interaction, etc.

6. *Interpret your observation results.* Based upon your observations, what task, maintenance and individual roles did you observe? How would you characterize the group climate? Who has power and what kind of power do they have?

7. *Recommendations.* Provide recommendations for improving communication to the group based upon your observations and the survey data. Focus here on small group practice. (For example, discussing how your data and observations fit within the Nine Core Small Group Competencies found in Chapter 1 might provide a good frame for your recommendations, although this is only one suggestion).

8. *Appendices.* Please include copies of your written permission, survey instruments, data summaries, thank you note, Executive Summary, and your group's PERT task diagram in an Appendix.

### **Part #3--Class Presentation**

You are also required to make a presentation to the class about what you observed. The best presentations are those that cover all of the above points, and are formally presented using PowerPoint. Make sure that you do the following in your presentation:

1. make sure that every person in your group is part of the presentation and dress as if you are giving a formal presentation;
2. talk for 20-30 minutes;
3. introduce all group members and provide an overview of what you will be doing;
4. discuss the points outlined above (procedures, surveys used, etc.);
5. end your presentation with a discussion of what you learned about small group communication while doing this group project.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Exam/Paper</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
1		Course Introduction	Chapter 1
2		Designing Theoretical Models	Chapter 2
3		Group Development (Moodle Readings)	Chapter 3
4	EXAM 1 Chapters 1-3	Preparing to Collaborate	Chapter 4
5		Relating to Others in Groups (Moodle Readings)	Chapter 5
6		Relating to Others in Groups Tips for writing papers Permission to Observe due	
7		Improving Group Climate	Chapter 6
8	Paper 1	Managing Conflict (Moodle Readings)	Chapter 8
9		Leading Groups A note on surveys	Chapters 7, 9, Appendix A
10	PERT Project Chart	Making Decisions and Solving Problems	Chapter 10
11	EXAM 2 Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8 plus readings	Using Problem Solving Techniques	Chapter 11
12		Using Problem Solving Techniques	Chapter 11
13		Enhancing Creativity	Chapter 12
14		Presentations on Project #2	
15	EXAM WEEK	Presentations on Project #2	