COMM 15 – Problem Solving & Critical Decision Making in Groups (5 units)

Instructor: Brandon Gainer
Location: Online
Time: **Asynchronous course (excluding 2 live presentations)**

Fulfills CSU GE & De Anza Area A3: Critical Thinking
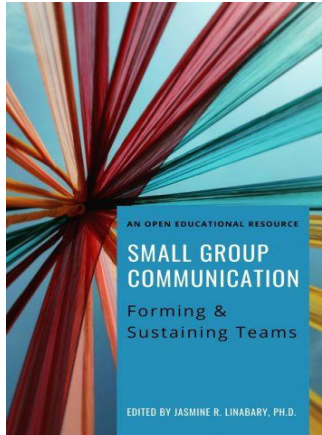Fulfills "Leadership Skills" Requirement for Leadership & Social

Instructor Contact Info
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Office Hours
Tuesday: 6:30-7:30 PM
Wednesday: 5-6 PM
(Zoom)
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Course Materials

Small Group Communication: Forming & Sustaining Teams

Zero-Cost Textbook. The text is available at the preceding hyperlink. A PDF version will also be available via Canvas.

Course Overview
Welcome to COMM 15! This course explores communication and critical decision making in the context of effective group problem solving with an emphasis on principles of evidence, logic, and reasoning. Although I'm sure all of you have experience doing collaborative projects, the goal of this class is for you to learn how to work **effectively** in groups and teams by allowing you to apply small group principles, management concepts and problem-solving methods in practical ways. These are skills that I genuinely feel are important no matter where your life or career path will take you.

COMM 15 Student Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Develop abilities to effectively facilitate discussions including active listening, nonverbal communication, managing tension, consensus building, and recording group discussion.
2. Display increasing confidence in ability to use a range of models and methods for problem solving, decision making, and collaborating.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of group communication and critical decision-making through self-reflection and shared feedback.
4. Develop, present, and critically evaluate informative and persuasive group presentations that are personalized to the audience, organized with an effective plan and purpose, and use information supported with quality sources that are accurately documented during the presentations and outlines.

Succeeding in COMM 15

✓ Your groupmates are your lifeline, especially in an online version of this class: Learn to rely upon them.
✓ Schedule live meetings when possible when tackling deep work: There's only so much a group text can do.
✓ If you've survived 2020, then you know anything can go wrong: Don't wait until the last minute to start on assignments.
✓ Passing is important, but being the group member that hyper-focuses on perfection will make everyone miserable, and get you *further away* from that goal.

Course Policies:

Note: An expanded version of these policies can be found on Canvas

Participation & Expected Time Commitment:
A common question I get is "how much time should this class take". According to our college's web page on credits and load limitations the formula is that each unit of a class equals one hour is with an additional 2 hours of outside preparation for every unit. So for a 5 unit class, that's 15 hours total (hence why "12 units" is considered "full time"). Your mileage may vary, but going drastically under that leads to decreased success in the course.

For my part, I'll make sure that the work you're doing in this class is intentional and not merely "busy work". I also acknowledge that you have commitments outside of class and will work towards helping you and your groupmates succeed. Regardless, you *do* need to put in the work and set aside the time.

Drops: Because this class is so heavily reliant on groups my drop policy is a bit stricter to ensure your teams operate efficiently. Failing to complete any of the first week's assignments (particularly the group preference sheet) may result in being dropped. After that, while I'll always reach out first, as well as consult your peers, if you go more than two weeks without logging in and completing assignments (individual or group assessments) I may drop you from the course to protect your group. I

Contacting the Instructor: I am accessible via e-mail, the Canvas inbox (preferred), office hours, or by phone. I typically will get back to you within 24-hours, if not sooner within my working hours (9 AM – 6 PM M-F) Remembering the following will ensure smooth communication between us:

➢ Putting your name, the course and what you're inquiring about in helps tremendously:
➢ Professionalism and kindness go a long way. If you take the time to compose a message that is clear, authentic, and generally *nice*, then I'll do the same.
➢ Hilarious pictures of pets, baking fails, or clever memes involving avians are always welcome.

Submitting Assignments: All assignments are to be submitted through Canvas in the required format (typically .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf). Unless I explicitly request it, please **do not** e-mail me an assignment: I will not grade it. Unless otherwise specified on Canvas, assignments are due at 11:59 PM PST. You can always submit items early.

Late Work: There is **24-hour** grace period after the due date where I will still accept most assignments; albeit for a reduced score (25% deduction) and no feedback. Certain assignments (e.g. group presentations, orientation activities) will not be accepted late.

Academic Honesty: Instances of academic misconduct will result in disciplinary action, which can include receiving a 0 on the assignment, or a recommendation for dismissal from the course. This includes, but is not limited to: **plagiarism**, **submitting work from a previous course**, **submitting work completed by an outside party**, or **misrepresenting facts to receive a changed grade**, etc. This applies to both individual and group submissions. Further information on these policies can be found here: De Anza Academic Integrity.

Accommodations: Connect with me early in the quarter to discuss needed course accommodations due to medical or other conditions. You may also contact your counselor and/or Disability Support Services.

Regarding Collaboration

By week 2, you will be placed in a group with 3-4 of your peers which will be your project group for the term. While you will have some control over who you select, be prepared to work with individuals who differ from you in terms of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic class and overall life circumstances. We will cover ways to build a supportive group climate and teach ways to address conflicts which may arise. Regardless, it is imperative that you show patience, understanding, and due attention to your peers both inside and outside of your group. Please approach the subject matter and assignments with an open-mind, a desire to collaborate and analyze various viewpoints.

Assignments List

Guidelines for each assignment will be posted online via Canvas. Below is a general description of each assignment area that you'll be assessed on throughout the term.

Assessment & Reflection [10%]: This category consists of the orientation exercises in week 1, as well as your analysis essays and performance reviews. These are all individual submissions.

Group Project [50%]: The majority of your grade in this class comes from the group project that you will complete together. This project is divided into multiple components and will have you create an outward-facing resource to benefit a community of your choosing. Specific details for the project as a whole and each component are posted in Canvas.

Discussion Threads [10%]: These are discussion threads where you'll share any insights or questions you have from the week's readings or material posted on Canvas.

Applied Communication Exercises [20%]: On most weeks there will be an exercise that has you applying a specific concept in relation to the week's lesson. These are individual submissions, though you are welcome to collaborate (with respect to academic integrity) with your peers on this. While there is an assessment rubric for these, I am primarily looking for **completion,** so as long as you're not completely off the mark with what the assignment's asking, then you'll receive credit. Your lowest score are dropped from this category.

Group Check-Ins [10%]: I expect you to regularly communicate with your group each week, so this category is asking you to provide evidence of that. This typically consists of two parts submitted on separate days: A **meeting agenda** for **one** of your group's scheduled meetings that week and a **meeting minutes** from said interaction. Your lowest score will be dropped from this category, because hey, sometimes there's collective memory loss in a group. When possible, I'll try to attend your meetings: If you explicitly invite me to a meeting, then I'

This class adds up to **60%** of your grade coming from your group and **40%** from your individual efforts. Don't let that be a cause for alarm: It is far more common for a strong group to benefit someone who slips up on the individual assignments than it is for a high performer that does well on the individual portions to be dragged down by a weak group.

With that taken into consideration, if you are still anxious about being in a group with non-participatory members, know that a process to remove a non-contributing or disruptive member *does* exist in the class and is outlined on Canvas.

Grading Scale

Final grades are assigned based on the following scale:

A+ [100%]	A [99%-94%]	A- [93%-90%]
B+[89%-87%]	B [86%-84%]	B-[83%-80%]
C+[79%-77%]	C[76%-70%]	D+ [69%-67%]
D[66%-64%]	D-[63%-60%]	F [59% and below]

Extra Credit: Extra credit will not be offered in this class: I believe in offering concessions built into the course are far more beneficial than creating extra work for either of us. As noted above, your lowest scores (including zeroes) are dropped from the Discussion., A.C.E., and Group Check-in categories. The benefit from this greatly exceeds any extra credit I could offer. As such, any requests for extra credit will not be granted (and quite honestly, cause me to lose a bit of respect for you).

Tentative Course Calendar

Topics & Readings: We will periodically revisit certain chapters in your text; the specific points of focus will be noted in the Weekly Overviews in Canvas. Certain topics may supplemental readings outside of the textbook

Date	Topics & Readings	Assignment(s) due
Week 1 9/25-9/30	Foundations of Group Communication **(Ch.1)** Preventing Social Loafing **(Chapter 9)**	**9/26:** Student Info Sheet; Discussion #1; Self Introduction **9/29:** Group Preference Sheet **9/30:** A.C.E. #1; Discussion Responses
Week 2 10/2-10/7	Group Development & Group Norms **(Ch. 2 & 4)** Facilitating Effective Meetings **(Chapter 14)** Theories of Small Group Communication	**10/3:** Group Agenda #1; Discussion #2 Applied Exercise #1 **10/7:** A.C.E. #2; Group Charter; Meeting Minutes #1; Discussion Responses
Week 3 10/9-10/14	Group Roles **(Chapter 3)** Decision Making & Problem Solving in Groups – An Introduction **(Chapters 10 & 11)**	**10/10:** Agenda #2; Discussion #3 **10/14:** A.C.E. #3; Project Proposal; Meeting Minutes 2; Discussion Responses
Week 4 10/16-10/21	Working in Diverse Teams **(Chapter 5)** Building Group Cohesion **(Chapter 7)**	**10/17:** Agenda #3; Discussion #4 **10/21:** A.C.E. #4; Data Collection; Meeting Minutes 3; Discussion Responses
Week 5 10/23-10/28	**Project Work-week** Preparing to Present as a Group **(Chapter 16)** Research & Information Evaluation	**10/28:** Project Outline
Week 6 10/30-11/4	**Project Status Update** **Presentation#1 Day – 11/1/2023**	**10/31:** Proof of Concept **11/4:** A.C.E.#5
Week 7 11/6-11/11	Managing Group Conflicts **(Chapter 8)** Assessing Group & Team Effectiveness	**11/7:** Discussion #5; Agenda #4 **11/11:** A.C.E.#6; Analysis Essay #1; Meeting Minutes 4; Discussion Responses
Week 8 11/13-11/18	Leadership Development in Groups **(Ch. 12 & 13)** Power in Groups **(Chapter 6)**	**11/14:** Agenda #5; Discussion #6 **11/18:** A.C.E.#7; Meeting Minutes #5; Discussion Responses
Week 9 11/20-11/25	Understanding Data Literacy Creativity & Innovation in Groups **(Chapter 15)**	**11/21:** Agenda #6; Discussion #7 **11/25:** Data Analysis; A.C.E.#8; Meeting Minutes #6; Discussion Responses
Week 10 11/27-12/2	Critical Thinking & Decision Making – A Recap	**11/28:** Group Check-in #7 **12/2:** A.C.E. #9
Week 11 12/4-12/9	**Group Project Wrap-Up**	**12/9:** Project Report; Analysis Essay #2 Performance Review
Finals	**Final Exam Period** **Presentation #2 – 12/13/2023**	**12/13: Final Resource**