

**SPCM 434: Small Group Communication**  
**Spring 2015**  
**Dr. Carolyn M. Prentice**  
**University of South Dakota**

**TEXTBOOK:**

Myers, S. A., & Anderson, C. M. (2008). *The fundamentals of small group communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Other readings as assigned available from University databases.

**COURSE PURPOSE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Much of human life is spent in small groups, as families, friends, neighborhoods, classmates, and team members—to mention a few. This class explores the dynamics of small groups in a variety of settings, both personal and professional. Upon completing this course, you will

- Identify and explain the changing communication dynamics as small groups develop.
- Identify and explain the roles group members may enact through communication, including leadership.
- Explain the communication process of group socialization.
- Identify and explain the tensions and conflicts that emerge within group communication.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Attendance:** Coming to class and joining in the discussion are important learning activities, and therefore attendance counts as 60 points. Your first two absences are not penalized, but all other absences after that drop your attendance grade by 3 points.

If you have an extended absence for some emergency, we'll talk about it; otherwise, you don't need to explain your absence.

1. **Two tests:** Two tests over the material will be multiple choice, short answer, and definition. The second test may include some of the material from the first test. 100 points each.
2. **Reflection questions:** These are short papers (2-5 single-spaced pages) in which you address specific questions that invite you to reflect on the readings, class discussion, and your own experience. Include citations. They are worth 50 points each. I expect that you address the questions specifically and write clearly and correctly. Therefore, they are graded on both content and writing. Two are required. The final one will be a reflection on your group experience. 50 points each, 100 points total.

3. **Participation:** Students learn more when they read the materials before class and come prepared to talk about the ideas in class. To encourage you to do this, I keep track of your daily participation—which includes answering questions, asking questions, giving examples, providing insights, expanding on ideas, as well as participating actively in small group discussion and activities. And you earn daily points for doing so. Some days will provide more opportunity for doing this than others. My daily goal is to get everyone in class to say something every day. Try to do your part by being prepared. 50 points
  
4. **Group Project:** You will work in a group of 3 or 4 people. Work with group over the course of the semester to produce a final project that applies group communication theory or models to a real or fictional group. This project will be presented in the final days of the semester as a presentation to the entire class. Details will be solidified as the semester progresses. Some class time will be allotted to this. **Be sure to apply group theory to the project.** 100 points. You will receive a group grade on the presentation. Suggested projects are:
  - Research and report on small groups from your own experience—such as work groups, friendship groups, families, sports teams, online gaming, etc.
  - Research and report on work groups as portrayed in the media. You could focus on reality TV, dramatic or comic TV, or perhaps several movies.
  - Research and report on family groups (larger than nuclear families) as portrayed in the media. You could focus on reality TV, dramatic or comic TV, or perhaps several movies.
  - Research and report on peer groups as portrayed in the media. You could focus on reality TV, dramatic or comic TV, or perhaps several movies.
  - Observe the workings of some other group or groups as a case study for applying or illustrating theory.
  - I'm open to other ideas, so please suggest something that interests you.

\*\*\*In addition, I ask that your group schedule some time to meet together socially sometime before spring break. I suggest that you eat together, watch a movie together, or something else. Keep a small journal of all your group interactions so that you can reflect on the whole experience in the final Reflection Questions paper.

5. **Voices of Discovery Program:** “The Voices of Discovery is an intergroup dialogue program at USD designed to create greater understanding between diverse groups of students through safe dialogues. The program will feature groups such as white/student of color group, GLBTIQ/heterosexual group, International/US group, Native American/non-Native group and a Women’s/ Men’s group. Each group will meet for two hours per week on campus for five weeks and led by trained facilitators. Pizza will be served at each meeting. To participate, fill out the application for the program and you will be informed shortly regarding the group in

which you will participate. For participation in the program, you will receive 50 course points if you attend all the sessions. Voices Program keeps attendance records and shares them with the professors.

6. **Group Experience Theory paper:** In addition to working with your group to create the presentation outlined above and participating in the Voices of Discovery program, you will use these group experiences as case studies to reflect on and demonstrate group theory concepts. You will write an individual and private paper that highlights three things you experienced in your groups reflecting concepts from the class. You can reference the textbook, but you are also expected to locate and read at least three other academic sources that provide more in-depth understanding of group theory. This paper will be 6-10 pages. More on this assignment later. **Remember to keep a journal** of your group interactions and communication in both your class group and your VoD group experiences. 100 points

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**

W	Date	Topic	Assignments to be completed for class
1		Introduction to class and each other	
		What is a small group? Why study them?	Chapter 1
2		Member traits	Chapter 3
		Socialization process in groups	Chapter 2
3		Socialization process	
		Small group development	Chapter 5
4		Peer groups/bona fide groups	TBA – and preparing for Voices of Discovery Begin your journal of VoD
		Group theories	TBA
5		Diversity in groups	Chapter 4
		Childhood groups	TBA
6		Research on groups	TBA
		Discussion Day/ review for test	<b>RQ1 due today</b> by 9 am.
7		<b>Test 1</b>	
		Return test; Group assignment given Roles in small groups	Chapter 6
8		Form groups	Continue VoD Journal and also keep journal of group working on project
		Day to work with your group	Plan social activity with group
9		Decision making in groups	Chapter 7
		Discussion day	<b>Submit RQ2</b> by 9 am (VoD questions)
10		Day to work with your group	
		TBA	

11		Roles in small groups	Chapter 8
		Leadership and Relational Com.	Chapter 9 and 10
12		Conflict and cohesion	Chapter 11 and 12
		Day to work with your group	
13		Symbolic Convergence theory	TBA
		Other group theories	
14		The family as a group	TBA
		Group presentations	
15		Group presentations	
		Reflecting on group work; discussion day	
16		<b>Test 2</b>	<b>Group Experience Theory Paper due</b>