

COM 406: Organizational Communication

Fall 2007

Schedule Number: 08816

Instructor: Dr. Kurt Lindemann

Time/Day/Room: 4:00-6:40, M, SH 244-A

Office: Communication 221

Office Phone: (619) 594-4945

Office Hours: MW, 11:00-12:00, 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

School of Communication Main Office: Communication 237, (619) 594-5450

E-mail: klindema@mail.sdsu.edu

Required Materials:

- 1) Eisenberg, E.M., Goodall, H.L., & Trethewey, A. (2007) *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's. (EGT)
 - 2) Course pack available at the SDSU Bookstore. (CP)
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What is this class all about?

Course Description: Organizations play an important role in our lives. Organizations—from work to church to sports teams—play an increasingly larger role in shaping self-identity, structuring experience, producing “knowledge,” and naturalizing complex symbolic forms. Communication also plays an important role in the process of organizing. In fact, some scholars argue that communication *is* organizing; whether it is a conversation about what movie to see and where to see it, a board room decision about new company initiatives, or a support group, communication organizes people into shared frames of symbolic meaning.

In this class, we will explore a diverse range of theories and perspectives on organizing and communicating. In doing so, we will talk about some decidedly non-traditional approaches to communication and organizing. While we will be studying corporations and corporate communication, this is *not* a business communication class. Rather, we will adopt a more critical perspective on organizations. This will entail examining, studying, and discussing communication, identity, power in organizations, and a host of other topics and theories that help explain the process of organizing through communication.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- 1) Articulate the importance of communication to the function and experience of organizing
- 2) Identify and differentiate concepts and theories relevant to communication in organizational contexts
- 3) Apply concepts, theories, and perspectives to hypothetical communication situations, case studies, and personal experience
- 4) Analyze organizational issues using a variety of communication perspectives and approaches

- 5) Execute a research project that examines some aspect(s) of organizational communication

What is expected of me in class?

Course Expectations: Students agreeing to the terms for the class as set out in this syllabus—*not dropping the class constitutes an agreement to the terms, including the grading policy*—are expected to do the following:

- 1) Be on time to class—see attendance policy
- 2) Be respectful and let others talk without interruption, including me
- 3) Read the assigned chapters/materials and engage in class discussions
- 4) Turn off cell phones and pagers—I cannot stress this enough
- 5) Treat others' viewpoints and experiences with respect
- 6) Make connections between the material and your own lives and experiences
- 7) Turn in assignments on time
- 8) Communicate with the instructor in advance about potential attendance conflicts

What's your teaching style like? Are you a hard grader?

I understand that some students would prefer to sit quietly, take notes and leave. Others prefer to discuss topics in a more free-form style. I like to conduct class in a semi-formal manner, sometimes sitting in a circle discussing the readings, sometimes lecturing with PowerPoint, and often doing hands-on activities. I will also look to you to lead discussion with your fellow classmates.

Students have described my teaching style as fair but firm, demanding and understanding. I think the grading process should be transparent. As such, you will receive a grading rubric—an evaluation sheet—that I will use in assessing your knowledge and skills on each assignment, so you will know exactly what I expect. This means that I expect you to read these rubrics thoroughly and to illustrate an understanding of those expectations and the skillful communication to meet them in your assignments.

Do you take attendance?

Attendance Policy: Attendance will be taken through the completion of in-class activities. Any student who misses more than two (2) classes will be penalized -5 points for every absence over two (two classes is roughly 10% of the class). These points will be subtracted from your total points in addition to any points missed for in-class activities. Any student arriving 10 to 15 minutes late may be marked absent. If you know you are going to be absent for a given class, please tell me ahead of time so I can decide whether the absence can be legitimately excused.

BlackBoard Participation: You are automatically entered into the e-mail list for our class. I can, via BlackBoard, send you updates about the class. Please make sure the e-mail you're registered with on our BlackBoard site is one you check regularly. Some of these updates may be important, so making these arrangements is a must.

Can I turn in assignments late? What if I need...?

Make-up, Late Work Policy: *Absolutely no* paper, exam or other assignment will be accepted after its due date if you do not talk with me before hand. I may make exceptions based on circumstances, so if you anticipate having problems, please see me. It is easier for us to deal with them before they happen than after they happen. You know when the exams, assignments, and homework are due, as they are listed on the Tentative Class Schedule, so you can adjust your own schedule accordingly. If you should miss a handout or lose a handout or the syllabus, contact a classmate or go to our BlackBoard course site. You are responsible for all materials on the day they are handed out.

Miscellaneous Conflicts Policy: I understand that many students have full or part-time jobs, children, family, etc. I am usually sensitive to this and try to do all I can to help you work schedule conflicts out. But there may come a time when nothing else can be done. In that case, I'll ask you to make some decisions about your priorities and responsibilities. Please feel free to talk to me about such problems in emergencies or in situations with unavoidable conflicts.

Disabilities or Special Needs: If you need special equipment or classroom accommodations for exams, please let me know and we will work with Student Disability Services together to provide an effective learning environment. If you come to me in the middle of the semester citing a learning disability as a cause of poor class performance and *are not* registered with SDS, there is nothing I can do.

Can I turn in papers by e-mail?

No. Please do not e-mail me attachments of anything. I ask this so that: 1) my e-mail does not get pushed over its memory quota; 2) I avoid problems with viruses; and 3) you can avoid the problem of e-mails not going through and you thinking that they did, or me overlooking attached papers and not giving you credit. If arranged with me before the due date, you may upload your paper via the Digital Dropbox on our BlackBoard site.

How often should I check our BlackBoard site? What class documents will be on there?

Please check Blackboard daily. Sometimes you will see an informal reflective writing assignment for the next class or a discussion questions to respond to. I will also post notes, study guides, and links to web sites that may be important for completing assignments.

What is the policy on grades, cheating, etc.?

Grading Policy: It will help you to understand your grades and your evaluation on tests and papers to remember that an "A" is not average, a "C" is. *And a "C" means that you have simply met the minimum requirements for a particular assignment.* In other words, if you only do everything that I ask you to, you are doing "C" work. The grade descriptions I abide by are as follows:

A, A- = outstanding work that is superior and demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the skills and material that far surpasses the minimum expectations of a student in the class.

B+, B, B- = above average work that demonstrates an understanding of the skills and material that exceeds the minimum requirements.

C+, C, C- = average work which illustrates that the student has met the minimum requirements and expectations for a particular assignment.

D+, D, D- = below average work in which the student does not meet the minimum expectations for a given assignment.

F = below average work in which little or no effort seems to have been expended by the student.

Plagiarism and Cheating Policy: Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is not tolerated. If plagiarism is detected and confirmed, the result will be failure in the assignment, and may result in failure of the course, as well as academic sanctions that include probation, suspension, or expulsion from the university.

Plagiarism is defined in this class as using another's work (including wording, phrases or original ideas) without giving that person credit. Additionally, sometimes we plagiarize unintentionally (use a paper from another class for a different assignment in a different class)—yes, this is also plagiarism in the eyes of the School, College, and University. Granted, we may not have the time or inclination to put those thoughts and phrases in our own words; we may not plagiarize out of maliciousness. However, I may look up your References and citations, so remain vigilant and aware. For details see the section on Cheating and Plagiarism in the SDSU Academic Senate policy (http://senate.sdsu.edu/policy/policy_file.pdf).

Can I contest a grade? What if I have questions about it?

If you want to contest a grade on *one assignment* (except those turned in during the final two weeks of class), I ask that you turn in a type-written argument as to why you deserve the grade you think you do. This argument must be no longer than one (1) page in length and be turned in *no later than two class periods* after it is graded. I will read your argument and make my decision, and if further discussion is warranted, you may discuss it with me in my office. I will *not* discuss such matters as a class. All matters are to remain between instructor and student.

What sorts of assignments will we be required to do?

Assignments Descriptions: The particulars of these assignments may change depending on the progress of the class, unexpected time constraints, and other miscellaneous factors. All papers to be turned in—except informal in-class writing and BlackBoard posts—must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, and follow APA guidelines. You will receive detailed guidelines for each assignment.

Exams and Quizzes (350 points, 35% of grade)

Exams: There will be two multiple-choice exams. You will receive a Study Guide for each one. *Two exams worth 150 points each for a total of 300 points.*

Quizzes: Five short quizzes will be done on BlackBoard. They are designed to give a sense of what exam questions will be like. *Five quizzes worth 10 points each for a total of 50 points.*

Assignments (400 points, 40% of grade)

Personal Application Paper. Drawing on your own experiences in and with organizations, you will apply several concepts from the EGT textbook to help you better understand the ways organizational communication has shaped your sense of self and others. For this 5-7 page paper, there is no research required other than the textbook. *Worth 75 points.*

Cultural Comparison Project: In groups of 3-5 people, you will use qualitative methods (participant observations, interviews, document analysis) to describe, analyze, and compare two organizational cultures. This research will culminate in a group-written 10-15 page paper (using at least seven sources *not* including the textbook), applying theories and perspectives from our readings. Your group will also present its findings to the class. *Worth 325 points (Proposal = 25 points, Paper = 150 points, Presentation = 50 points, Field notes and transcripts = 50 points, Analytic Memos = 50).*

Class Discussion, In-Class Activities, BlackBoard Discussion Posts (250 points, 25% of grade)

Discussion Question Responses: Periodically, I will post discussion questions about the readings on BlackBoard. I will expect students to respond with a post to our discussion board that shows an attempt to understand and apply the readings. These will be the only opportunities for me to assess your individual writing skills, so you should treat them as short papers. *Ten posts worth 12 points each for a total of 120 points.*

Class Activities: On many class days we will do in-class activities, which may consist of in-class writing, work sheets, problem-solving exercises, etc. Students who present that day and turn in or complete the activities will be given points. *Thirteen activities worth 10 points each for a total of 130 points.*

What do you expect from written assignments?

You'll receive a grading rubric for each assignment, but here is a general list of what I expect from your writing assignments. While you may not accomplish all of these objectives in early assignments, my goal is that your later assignments will meet all of these expectations.

- 1) Use thesis sentences. These appear early in the paper, essay, or entry. They provide the reader with a general idea of what you will address in the rest of the piece.
- 2) Organize distinctly different ideas into paragraphs. Paragraphs should be at least three sentences long and should address one general idea.

- 3) Use topic sentences. Topic sentences are sentences at or near the beginning of each paragraph and preview the content of the paragraph.
- 4) Provide examples. Use examples to support and illustrate your topic sentences and other argumentative statements.
- 5) Always try to paraphrase rather than quote sources directly (except in the case of interviews and field notes). This shows the reader that you understand and have internalized the original author's ideas. Remember, though, to cite, even if you paraphrase.
- 6) When using direct quotations, always lead into or follow up quotes with your own words. Consider these three sentences:
 - a. "Organizational communication is an important area of study" (Smith, 2007, p. 5). →NO.
 - b. Smith (2007) states, "Organizational communication is an important area of study" (p. 5). →YES.
 - c. "Organizational communication is an important area of study," argues Smith (2007, p. 5). →YES.
- 7) Begin and end pieces with a bang. Beginning and ending papers effectively is usually the hardest part of academic writing. Besides previewing and reviewing, give the reader something to think about.
- 8) Err on the side of over-explaining your reasoning rather than under-explaining it. While you're writing for an academic audience, don't assume they know everything you do about a topic.

Do you "bump up" students to the next highest grade?

Grading Scale: Please don't expect to get bumped up to the next grade if you're within a few points, because you'll be disappointed. I do this to be fair: I genuinely come to like many of my students. If I bumped up everyone I liked, it would defeat the purpose of the points. Therefore, a grade is not a reflection of my opinion of you as a person or even as a student in general, just your academic performance in this class.

930-1000	=	A
900-929	=	A-
870-899	=	B+
830-869	=	B
800-829	=	B-
770-799	=	C+
730-769	=	C
700-729	=	C-
670-699	=	D+
630-669	=	D
600-629	=	D-
< 599	=	F

COMM 406 Organizational Communication
Tentative Class Schedule

The dates of these assignments may change as the class progresses. “EGT” refers to chapters in the textbook, “CP” refers to a course pack reading, and “BD” means that the discussion question posted on BlackBoard should be answered *by the start of class period on the day that they are listed as due*. Although in-class activities are listed on only certain days, we will be doing activities during other days as well. Those activities will be announced in class.

Week	Topic	Readings and Assignments Due
ONE		
Monday, 8/27	Introductions to class and each other Organizing change, changing organizations	EGT 1
TWO		
Monday, 9/3	Labor Day	No Class
THREE		
Monday, 9/10	Defining Organizations Historical Perspectives <i>Introduce Cultural Comparison Project</i>	EGT 2, 3; BD #1 ; <i>In-class #1, In-class #2; Quiz #1</i>
FOUR		
Monday, 9/17	Cultural Studies of Organizations and Communication Field Research (Ethnography) in Organizational Communication	EGT 5, Appendix; Brown (CP); BD #2 ; <i>In-class #3; Quiz #2</i>
FIVE		
Monday, 9/24	Cultural Performances in Organizations	Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo (CP); Scheibel (CP); BD #3 ; <i>Quiz #3; In-class #4</i>
SIX		
Monday, 10/1	Critical Approaches to Organizations and Communication	EGT, 6; Cultural Comparison Project Proposal Due ; <i>In-class #5</i>
SEVEN		
Monday, 10/8	Critical Approaches to Organizations and Communication	Clair (CP); Van Maanen (CP); BD #4 ; <i>In-class #6</i>
EIGHT		
Monday, 10/15	Exam #1 (EGT—1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & course pack readings from first eight weeks)	Exam #1
NINE		
Monday, 10/22	Identity & Difference in Organizational Life Coding field notes	EGT, 7; BD #5 ; <i>In-class #7; Tracy (CP); Bring field notes to class</i>

TEN		
Monday, 10/29	Identity & Difference in Organizational Life	Trethewey (CP); Spradlin (CP); <i>In-class #8</i> ; BD #6 ; <i>Personal Application Paper Due</i>
ELEVEN		
Monday, 11/5	Democracy & Participation in the Workplace Teams & Networks	EGT, 8; EGT, pp. 111-119; BD #7 ; <i>In-class #9</i> ; Quiz #4 ; <i>Bring two analytic memos to class</i>
TWELVE		
Monday, 11/12	<i>Veterans Day—No class</i>	
THIRTEEN		
11/19	Communicating Leadership Organizational Communication as Disciplined Practice	EGT 9; Quiz #5 ; <i>In-class #10</i> ; BD #8 ; EGT 11; <i>In-class #11</i> ; BD #9
FOURTEEN		
11/26	Presentations	<i>Cultural Comparison Project Due</i> ; <i>Project Presentations</i> ; <i>In-class #12</i>
FIFTEEN		
12/3	Presentations Exam Review & Wrap-Up	<i>Project Presentations</i> ; <i>In-class #13</i> ; BD #10
SIXTEEN		
12/10	Exam #2 (EGT—7, 8, 9, 11, pp. 111-119 & course pack readings from second eight weeks)	Exam #2