

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

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

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



Instructor Contact Info

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Office Hours

Tues.: 4:30-6:30 PM
Thurs.: 4:30-6:30 PM
 (subject to change as demand necessitates)

Course Materials



Rothwell, J.D. *In Mixed Company: Communicating in Small Groups and Teams* (10th ed.)

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 synchronous 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 and an A 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; I've kept what's listed here brief.

A Foreword Regarding Technology

By now, everyone should be (in some cases, reluctantly) used to online courses. I will do my best to quickly resolve issues that I have control over within Canvas (broken links; missing files; etc.). If you are experiencing issues with Canvas beyond this, file a help-desk ticket clicking "**Help**" in Canvas. That said, technological discomfort, unfamiliarity, or difficulties will not be accepted as an excuse for late or incomplete work: Start early as your timeline permits to avoid such issues.

Attendance: Since this is a 5-unit course, ideally you should set aside a **minimum** of 5 hours per week if you expect to be successful in the course (and not a liability to your group). That said, this class is **mostly** asynchronous: There will be two required meeting dates for group presentations on Week 6 and during finals week. There is a session during week 1 for group formation that is optional, but **strongly** recommended. Other optional meeting sessions may be offered contingent on demand.

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 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: e.g. "Brandon Gainer, COMM 15, Group Project Question"
- 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.
- I'll respond to e-mails between 10:00 AM – 1 PM. I shut my office phone line off after 5 PM.
- 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.

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- Any edits to an assignment done after the due date will count as a late submission.

Late Work: All assignments have a **24-hour** grace period after the due date where I will still accept them. Assignments submitted within this timeframe will receive a reduced score (up to 50%) and no feedback. Certain assignments (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 4-5 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 [14%]: 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. 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.

Open Discussions (Thoughts, Questions, Epiphanies) [5%]: These are discussion threads where you'll share any insights or questions you have from the week's readings or material posted on Canvas. There's no requirement to respond to classmates (though it makes for a more engaging discussion!) and are graded solely on completion. Your lowest <x> scores will be dropped from this category. These are noted as "T.Q.E." in the course calendar.

Applied Communication Exercises [21%]: 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 <x> scores are dropped from this category.

Group Check-Ins [10%]: I expect you to regularly communicate with your group each week. Periodically, I will be asking you to submit something as a "Group Check-in". 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.

Grading Scale

There are **500** points total available in this course. Final grades are assigned based on the following scale:

A+ [100%]: 500 and above	A [99%-94%]: 499-470	A- [93%-90%]: 469-450
B+[89%-87%]: 449-435	B [86%-84%]: 434-420	B-[83%-80%]: 419-400
C+[79%-77%]: 399-385	C[76%-70%]: 384-350	D+ [69%-67%]: 349-335
D[66%-64%]: 334-320	D-[63%-60%]: 319-300	F [59% and below]: 299 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 T.Q.E., 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 be ignored (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

Assignments: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at 12:00 PM (**noon**, not midnight). You can always submit items early.

Date	Topics & Readings	Assignment(s) due
Week 1 1/4-1/9	Communication Competence in Groups (Ch.1) Groups as Systems (Ch.2)	1/5: Student Info Sheet; TQE#1; Self Introduction 1/8: Group Preference Sheet 1/9: A.C.E. #1
Week 2 1/11-1/16	Virtual Groups & Teams (Ch.12) Facilitating Effective Meetings (Ch.9; p.217-221; Ch.12; p.304-306) Group Development (Ch.3)	1/12: Group Check-in #1; TQE#2 Applied Exercise #1 1/16: A.C.E. #2; Group Charter; Meeting Minutes
Week 3 1/18-1/23	Group Roles Development (Ch.5) Decision-Making & Problem Solving: Effective vs. Ineffective practices (Ch. 8 & 9)	1/19: Group Check-in #2; TQE#2 1/23: A.C.E. #3; Project Proposal; Meeting Minutes
Week 4 1/25-1/30	Developing the Group Climate (Ch.4) Researching & Evaluating Information (Ch.8 p.180-188; Ch.9 210-215)	1/26: Group Check-in #3; TQE#4 1/30: A.C.E. #4; Data Collection; Meeting Minutes
Week 5 2/1-2/6	Project Work-week Group Oral Presentations (Appendix B)	2/2: Project Outline
Week 6 2/8-2/13	Project Status Update Presentation#1 Day – 2/10/2021	2/9: Proof of Concept 2/13: A.C.E.#5
Week 7 2/15-2/20	Leadership in Groups (Ch.6) Improving Group Effectiveness (Ch.7)	2/16: T.Q.E.#5; Group Check-in #4 2/20: A.C.E.#6; Analysis Essay #1; Meeting Minutes
Week 8 2/22-2/27	Managing Conflict in Groups (Ch.11)	2/23: Group Check-in #5; T.Q.E.#6 2/27: A.C.E.#7; Meeting Minutes
Week 9 3/1-3/6	Critical Thinking & Data Literacy	3/2: Group Check-in #6; T.Q.E.#7 3/6: Data Analysis; A.C.E.#8; Meeting Minutes
Week 10 3/8-3/14	Critical Thinking & Decision Making – A Recap (Ch.8 & 9)	3/9: Group Check-in #7 3/14: A.C.E. #9
Week 11 3/15-3/20	Group Project Wrap-Up	3/20: Project Report; Analysis Essay #2 Performance Review
Finals	Final Exam Period Presentation #2 – 3/24/2021	3/23: Final Resource