

Northeastern University
Department of Communication Studies
Spring 2005

CMNU531: Advanced Organizational Communication

**Theme: Culture as Communication –
Living and Working in a Communication Culture**

Sequence F; Key #23451

Tuesday & Friday 1:35 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Location: 135 Shillman

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| Instructor: Dr. Walter Carl Office: 119 Holmes Office Phone Number: 617-373-4075 E-mail: w.carl@neu.edu | Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:45 am – 12:30 pm; 3:30 – 4:30 pm Thursdays 1:30 – 3:00 pm Fridays 11:45 am – 12:30 pm and by appointment |
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Course Description

The purpose of this course is three-fold: to build on your basic knowledge of organizational communication principles and concepts, to enhance your ability to apply these concepts in organizational assessment activities and generating strategies for organizational change, and to acquire skill and experience in doing organizational research in applied settings. The course is divided into three distinct segments that will: 1) review basic organizational communication principles; 2) explore ethical organizational imperatives for internal and external organizational communication, and 3) reflectively consider what counts as “good” and “competent” communication in organizational life. The common thread that ties together each of these segments is a critical and ethical interrogation of what counts as “good” and “ethical” communication in and by organizations. The course is structured to give students experience in developing communication-based skills (both oral and written) through class participation, instructional activities, organizational research, and the analysis and presentation of organizational case studies and course concepts.

Course Pre -Requisite

Students must have taken and passed the introductory organizational communication course (CMNU231/CMN 1430) or must have instructor approval in order to take this course. Otherwise, students will be dropped from this class.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to help you meet the following objectives:

- to further develop an understanding of the function of communication in organizations;
- to provide both theoretical approaches and practical experience in the assessment of organizational communication functioning and the preparation for crisis situations;
- to participate in activities designed to develop knowledge and skills necessary to successfully analyze and address organizational communication issues (with the goal of enhancing the quality of organizational communication processes);
- to reflect and assess one’s own competence in communication-based skills required for effective participation in organizational life;
- to respectfully consider the ethical complexities of organizational communication issues.

Course Readings and Materials

Required Reading:

- Tompkins, P. K. (2005). *Apollo, Challenger, Columbia – the decline of the space program: A study in organizational communication*. Los Angeles: Roxbury.
- Cameron, D. (2000). *Good to talk?: Living and working in a communication culture*. London: Sage.

Reserve Reading for Principles of Organizational Communication Review (Segment 1):

- Eisenberg, E. M., & Goodall, H. L. (2001). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint* (3rd ed.). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press.
- Zaremba, A. J. (2003). *Organizational communication: Foundations for business and management*. Thomson/South-Western.
- Self-directed work team reading is available on course Blackboard site.

Below is a list of course materials you will need:

- access to supplementary readings placed on reserve at the University library;
- additional small purchases such as an index cards, magazines, newspapers, photocopies, presentation binders, etc.;
- access to, and proficiency is using, a computer, e-mail, Blackboard, and the internet;
- high density floppy disk or Zip disk.

In addition to meeting in a traditional classroom, this course will be supplemented with web technology, specifically Blackboard. Students can access handouts, assignment sheets, and course readings, as well as their grades as soon as they are posted through Blackboard.

Students with Disabilities and Special Challenges

I would like to hear from anyone who has a disability or a special challenge that requires some modification of the seating or other class requirements so that we can make appropriate arrangements (in conjunction with the Disability Resource Center). Please see me after class or during office hours.

Projects & Grading

Exam 1 and Self-Directed Work Teams – 10% As part of a self-directed team, you will prepare for Quiz 1, which will assess your competency of the basic concepts from the Principles of Organizational Communication class (CMNU231). The exam, taken individually in class, will be worth 10%; each students' grade for the exam will be a combination of her or his own individual score and the average of her or his group members' score). The format for Exam 1 will be some combination of matching, short answer identifications, and essay questions.

Organizational Imperatives Research Presentations (Partners) – 15% Students will partner with a colleague and present contrasting positions on principles and imperatives discussed in the Phil Tompkins text – *Apollo, Challenger, Columbia – the decline of the space program: A study in organizational communication*.

Position Paper – 15% In conjunction with reading and discussion of the Deborah Cameron text – *Good to talk?: Living and working in a communication culture* – students will write a position paper (between 1000- 1250 words) on one of the author's primary arguments. Students have the option of submitting the paper topic for Instructor feedback and/or approval.

Applied Research Report – 25% For this project, students will be positioned as an external consultant who has been retained by an organization to conduct a “state-of-the-art” literature review and determine best practices for a particular communicative challenge faced by an organization. The research will result in a typed, 2000-word (approximately) report. A goal of this project will be to consult academic and trade publications, as well as organizational practitioners, and translate the findings, insights, and arguments into actionable steps for the organization. Students can choose their own topics (with Instructor approval) or respond to scenarios provided by the Instructor. Principles and insights from the Tompkins and Cameron texts should inform the report.

Exam 2 – 15% Exam 2 will be held during Final Exams week. The exam will require students to synthesize course concepts discussed throughout the term. Questions for the exam will be derived from class discussion and are likely to be in essay form.

Class Participation & Attendance – 20% This portion of your grade includes contributions for in-class discussion, in-class activities, attendance, homework assignments, listening responsiveness, case studies, etc. For expectations on class participation, see section below entitled “Participation and Attendance.”

The following table shows what percentages correspond to each letter grade:

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| Letter Grade = % | B+ = 87-89 | C+ = 77-79 | D+ = 67-69 |
| A = 93-100 | B = 83-86 | C = 73-76 | D = 63-66 |
| A- = 90-92 | B- = 80-82 | C- = 70-72 | D- = 56-62 F = 0-55 |

Please feel free to check with me about your progress at any time throughout the quarter. To do this, schedule a meeting time with me and bring *specific* questions. If you would like to discuss any project with me after I give you feedback/evaluations, please wait twenty-four hours to “catch your breath” and collect your thoughts; again, be sure you bring *specific* questions to our discussion.

Participation and Attendance

Students will be expected to critically assess the course readings, to argue a coherent position on course topics, and to be challenged by others in the class regarding these positions. Effective participation in course discussions includes being able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of course material and have something insightful to say about it;
- facilitate development of a coherent discussion thread;
- respect other's contributions and awareness of a challenging and supportive classroom climate;
- permit others the opportunity to contribute as well.

Because class participation and discussion are an integral part of this course, it is essential that students show up to class and in a timely manner (i.e., at the start of class would be the best time for this). Otherwise, you can miss two (2) class periods without penalty. For each class missed beyond this without a University-excused absence, one (1) point per class missed will be deducted from your class participation grade. If you know you are going to be absent or late on a certain day, please let me know ahead of time. Even if you are absent/late you are still responsible for any work that is assigned or due.

Note: Since showing up late to class can be rude and disrespectful, an absence will be counted for every three (3) tardy appearances.

Students will be required to complete a self-evaluation sheet for their class participation, which will be provided by the Instructor.

Late Work

All assignments are due at the start of class on the day listed on the syllabus (unless otherwise discussed in class and announced on Blackboard). If you anticipate that you will have difficulty turning in an assignment on time, notify the Instructor by e-mail as soon as possible and we may be able to negotiate special arrangements. *If an assignment is turned in late without notifying the Instructor at least 24 hours in advance, the following penalties may apply:* turned in by 6 p.m. on due date (-5 points; ½ letter grade); turned in next day after due date (-10 points; full letter grade); -5 points will be deducted for each additional day assignment is not turned in.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is borrowing others' words or thoughts without their permission and without giving them proper credit (for example, by using a citation system such as APA or MLA). The penalty for plagiarism can be failure on a project and/or in a course, a permanent mark on your record, and/or expulsion from the University. Plagiarism is often a result of ignorance, laziness, or fear of not getting a high grade. If you are tempted to plagiarize, please consider that it is generally better to fail an assignment than it is to fail an entire course, or to be expelled from the University. If you are considering plagiarism because you are having trouble doing the assignment due to not understanding it or because you feel you will do poorly, then please come talk to me (before the assignment is due).

Cellular Phones, Beepers, Pagers, and Alarms

Before entering the classroom, please turn off all cell phones, beepers, pagers, alarms, and any other bits of technology that could disrupt the class.

| -- SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE -- | | |
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| DATE | TOPICS | READINGS TO BE DISCUSSED/INFO |
| Jan. 07 F (1) #1 | Course Introduction & Self-Directed Work Team Assignment | Buy books, familiarize self with Blackboard (Bb) site |
| Jan. 11 T (2) | Review Day #1 Org. Comm. Theory & Research | Self-Directed Work Team Reading (Bb) |
| Jan. 14 F (3) #2 | Review Day #2 Communication Flow and Group Processes | Read relevant notes and texts from (CMNU231 class) |
| Jan. 18 T (4) | Review Day #3 Org. Climate, Culture, & Assessment | Read relevant notes and texts from (CMNU231 class) |
| Jan. 21 F (5) #3 | Exam 1 | Bring 3"x5" index card for notes |
| Jan. 25 T (6) | Return Exam 1 & Discuss Introduction to Tompkins' Text <i>Assign Research Presentations</i> | Read Preface & Introduction (15 pp); Brief history of NASA (pp. 51-57) |
| Jan. 28 F (7) #4 | Web Site Analysis of NASA's Organizational Culture & Climate (Out-of-Class Research) | See Homework Assignments (Bb) & http://www.nasa.gov |
| Feb. 01 T (8) | Introduction Narrating the Mystery of <i>Columbia</i> | Read c. 1 (17pp) Read c. 2 (21 pp) |
| Feb. 04 F (9) #5 | Culture as Communication at NASA & MSFC <i>Assign Applied Research Report</i> | Read c. 3 (17 pp) Read c. 4 (40 pp) |
| Feb. 08 T (10) | Challenger Accident Narrating the <i>Columbia</i> Mystery (cont.) | Read c. 5 (13 pp) Read c. 6 (30 pp) |
| Feb. 11 F (11) #6 | Reading the CAIB Report Mid-Term Assessment | Read c. 7 (33 pp) Read CAIB Excerpts (TBA; Bb) |
| Feb. 15 T (12) | Speaking Truth to Power in Light of Organizational & Institutional Decline | Read c. 8 (29 pp) |
| Feb. 18 F (13) #7 | Wrap-Up: What <i>Spiderman</i> Has To Do With NASA & Preparing for Organizational Life | Read c. 9 (23 pp) |
| Feb. 22 T (14) | Research Presentations – Day 1 | Presentation Outlines & Essay Due |
| Feb. 25 F (15) #8 | Research Presentations – Day 2 | Presentation Outlines & Essay Due |
| Feb. 26 - Mar. 06 | Spring Break – NO CLASSES | |
| Mar. 08 T (16) | Introduction to Cameron's Text | Read Prologue (2 pp) Read Introduction (23 pp) |
| Mar. 11 F (17) #10 | Codifying Communication Cameron's Research Methods | Read c. 2 (29 pp) Read Appendix (4 pp) |
| Mar. 15 T (18) | Talk As Enterprise: Communication & Culture at Work | Read c. 3 (38 pp) |
| Mar. 18 F (19) #11 | Communication Factories | Read c. 4 (34 pp) |
| Mar. 22 T (20) | Schooling Spoken Discourse | Read c. 5 (23 pp) |
| Mar. 25 F (21) #12 | Communication & the Pursuit of Happiness | Read c. 6 (29 pp) & Epilogue (5 pp) |
| Mar. 29 T (22) | Language in the Workplace (LWP) Project | Access LWP website (Bb) |
| Apr. 01 F (23) #13 | Applied Research in Organizational Settings | <i>Position Paper Due</i> |
| Apr. 05 T (24) | Workshop Applied Research Reports | TBA |
| Apr. 08 F (25) #14 | Workshop Applied Research Reports | TBA |
| Apr. 12 T (26) | Course Wrap-Up & Evaluations Exam 2 Review | Applied Research Report Due |
| Apr. 15, 18-22 | Final Exam Week | Take-Home Exam 2 (due Monday, April 18 th by 4:30 pm in 101 Lake) |