

CMM 401/501
Organizational Communication
Spring 2017
Wednesday 4:00 – 6:20 pm; Smith 227

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Office Hours

Monday	12:30 - 1:30 & 3:30 - 4:30 pm
Tuesday	2:00 - 4:30 pm
Wednesday	12:30 - 1:30 pm
Thursday	2:00 - 4:30 pm

Other times by appointment.

Course Description

Communication is among the most fundamental of human activities. Much of our communication, both deliberate and unintended, occurs in the context of our professional lives. Most of us live our professional lives in the context of organizations, whether they're for-profit, not-for-profit, or non-profit.

This course offers you the opportunity to develop a thorough—and practical—understanding of human communication in complex organizations. We'll approach organizational communication from a number of theoretical perspectives, and at multiple analytical levels. Throughout, we'll keep our eyes on the prize: the ways your refined understanding of organizational communication will directly benefit you as a working professional.

You'll do a lot of writing in this course, formal and informal. If that thought gives you a case of the epizooties, maybe it's because you're insecure about your writing skills. Relax, pilgrim, and trust the Force. Keep in mind that significant opportunities often present themselves as challenges. My advice is to take advantage of this opportunity—and I guarantee that developing your writing ability now will benefit you greatly in the future.

Learning Objectives

So what's the payoff, exactly, for all your hard work in this course?

- A conceptual understanding of the nature of communication in organizations.
- Familiarity with the major scholarly perspectives on organizations.
- Skill in analyzing and interpreting communication dynamics within organizations.
- Practical insights into your own—and others'—behaviors in an organizational context.
- Development of your analytical thinking and writing abilities.

In plain language, we're going to connect the scholarly literature to the real world. The way this works is that you hit the textbooks to pick up useful *concepts* about this kind of communication, and you *apply* those abstractions to actual life experiences in the workplace.

Motivation

Your success in this course is in your own hands. As in so many other activities, your commitment is crucial. At one level, this is simple: come to class, be prepared for the class, and participate fully in the class. At a deeper level, this is complex: only you can promise you will do that, and then keep that promise to yourself.

Required Books

Miller, K. (2009). *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2009). *Organizational Communication for Survival: Making Work, Work* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Plagiarism

The development of the World Wide Web has opened a great many wonderful opportunities to all of us. It has also made it easier than ever to misrepresent someone else's work as our own.

Don't do it.

Plagiarism is a fool's shortcut. Not only do you cheat yourself of the opportunity to learn and grow, but you expose yourself to severe academic penalties.

Plagiarism is dishonest. In the *I Ching* there is a saying that sincerity inspires respect. Earn your self-respect through your own efforts.

A Useful Tip

Try this four-step technique for reading course materials. It's probably different from what you're used to doing, but you might find it very helpful in deepening both your comprehension and recall of the material.

- First browse the entire section you've been assigned. Let your eyes go where they want to: check out the headings, bold-faced terms, diagrams and figures, whatever paragraphs catch your attention. Don't make any marks in your book or take any notes at this point. Just get a sense of how the section is put together, and what the main ideas are.
- Next, look for summary materials the book might include. There may be a chapter summary at the end. There may be a preview, or a bullet list of important ideas, or a glossary of key terms at the beginning. Whatever forms the summary materials may be in, read them slowly and carefully. Let those ideas sink in.
- Then read through the assignment in sequence. Highlight passages, make margin notes, write things in your notebook. Take your time with this reading, and let the familiarity you gained by browsing guide your highlighting and note taking.
- Finally, jot down notes to yourself about anything that isn't clear in your mind, or you want to question. Mention those things in class.

This four-step process won't require much more time, but I think you'll find you have a far better grasp of the material as a result. Try it and see.

As an added bonus, you even get points for bringing those notes (the fourth step) to class. Wow! Here's the 411 on these reading notes:

Handwritten is fine. Keep a notepad with you as you do the reading, and jot down questions about passages, puzzlements of any sort, *eureka!* moments, and *yeah, but...* moments. Be sure to note the page numbers for the passages that prompt your reactions. Put your name on the top, and turn it in at the class when that reading is due.

Course Calendar

Week 1

January 11—Course Introduction, the Syllabus, Scholarly Lit and Real Life

Week 2

January 18—The Lay of the Land

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Read through the syllabus carefully. Browse both books thoroughly.
- *Writing assignment for this class (#1):*
Outline both books, just the chapters you're assigned in this syllabus. Use a topic outline, and go three levels deep. (The chapter title is the first level.)

Annotate both outlines with your initial reactions to the material. What looks like it will be particularly useful to you? What piques your curiosity? What prompts a skeptical or critical reaction, at first glance? What looks commonsense, intuitive? (Use some kind of typographic device to make clear what's book outline and what's your reaction. Like, put your reactions in a different font, or whatever.)

Then identify parts of the books that connect to each other, and parts that contrast with each other. Put this in a separate section of the paper. Just make a list of those connections and contrasts with brief explanations of your thought—don't try to turn it into an essay!

Week 3

January 25—What's Your Theory, Eh?

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Richmond & McCroskey—preface, ch. 1, ch. 2, ch. 3.
- *Do your reading notes! (Handwritten is fine, 'member?)*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#2):*
From the "preliminary principles for peons" in ch. 1, choose two that you followed and two that you violated, at some point in your organizational adventures. For each, describe the situation and your actions, identify the consequences (positive or negative), and comment on the extent to which you acted consciously/intentionally or unconsciously/carelessly.

Week 4

February 1—Old School

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Miller—ch. 2, ch. 3.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#3):*
These two chapters describe two distinct scholarly perspectives on organizational communication. Run this drill on both of them, in separate sections of your paper:
 - 1. What insights might the perspective generate, about organizational communication? (That is, what can it draw attention to, explain, call into question, show the importance of..?)*
 - 2. What aspects of organizational comm might it obscure, overlook, gloss?*
 - 3. Describe the ideology underlying that perspective. (That is, identify what seem to be the values and foundational assumptions—about human behaviors, needs/motivations, complex organizations, economics, whatever—inherent in the perspective.)*

Week 5

February 8—Like Clockwork

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Miller—ch. 4.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#4):*
Run the same drill as last week, on this single chapter.

Week 6

February 15—Tribes and Tribulations

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Miller—ch. 5, ch. 6.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#5):*
One more time! Run the same drill on these chapters as the last two weeks—each chapter in a separate section.

Week 7

February 22—Personality (and Its Discontents)

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 6, ch. 7.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#6):*
Think of some time, in your organizational adventures, when you experienced a genuine personality clash with a coworker. (Not simply a work-related disagreement, but an actual relationship problem which affected the work.) Write a miniature case study of it, in three parts. Use headings to delineate the three parts.
 1. *Tell the story, concisely enough that it isn't tedious and completely enough to substantiate your analysis in the third part.*

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2. *Troll both chapters for concepts which apply to your experience—both to you and your adversary. In this section, just list them and provide concise definitions in your own words.*

3. *Analyze the story using those concepts.*

Week 8

March 1—The Dreaded Midterm Exam

Week 9

March 8—Arguing It Out

- *Reading assignment for this class:
Miller—ch. 9.
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 13.*

- *Don't forget your reading notes!*

- *Writing assignment for this class (#7):
Do the case analysis questions at the end of the Miller chapter. Put each question in its own section, numbered as in the book. In each section, first cover all the elements of that question for which you have concrete ideas. Then mention the elements which stump you, and say why. Note: a good explanation of your puzzlement is worth as much on the grade as a concrete answer!*

Nothing says you can't use the Richmond & McCroskey reading to help answer the questions. And nothing says you can't take issue with any of the theory covered in the chapter—but it's crucial to explain the reason for your critique.

Week 10

March 15—Tight With the Boss

- *Reading assignment for this class:
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 4, ch. 14.*
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*

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- *Writing assignment for this class (#8):*

Think of three jobs (or volunteer positions) you've held or now hold. They could be similar positions at different companies, or different lines of work entirely. Each position is a section of this paper, so each gets a heading.

Then divide each section into two subsections—with their own subheadings, of course! Describe each of those jobs; be concise enough not to be tedious, but complete enough that your reader has a clear sense of what the job was like. Then analyze each in terms of the satisfiers/dissatisfiers model in ch. 14. (Your two subsections are satisfiers and dissatisfiers, dig?) Be specific about what your personal satisfier/dissatisfier factors are/were.

☺ *Yahooie—it's spring break! (Just remember to come back to MU, K?)*

Week 11

March 29—Being the Boss

- *Reading assignment for this class:
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 9.
Miller—ch. 8.*
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#9):*

Think of the best boss you ever had. Then think of the worst boss you ever had. Those are the two sections of this paper, so give them appropriate headings.

OK, here come your subsections—give them appropriate subheadings, eh? Analyze both your bosses, using this template. Be sure to include enough specific detail about the person's behaviors, to substantiate your analysis.

1. *General description of the job, the organization, your boss.*
2. *Your boss, in terms of MacGregor's Theory X/Theory Y.*
3. *Your boss, in terms of Blake & Mouton's grid (Figure 9.1).*
4. *Your boss's MCS (Figure 9.2).*
5. *The worst things about your best boss, and the best things about your worst boss. (Couch this subsection in analytical terms, K? Don't vent, or gush.)*

Week 12

April 5—Plus ça Change

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 12.
Miller—ch. 10, ch. 13.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#10):*

For either one of the Miller chapters, do the case analysis questions—the same as we did in week 9. The Richmond & McCroskey reading has serious application to these cases, BTW...

Week 13

April 12—In the Eye of the Beholder

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 8, ch. 10, ch. 11.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#11):*

Think of an organization you belonged to (it needn't have been a paying job), which had an interesting culture. (IOW, you figure you'll have interesting analytical things to say about it!)

Here are the sections of the paper:

- 1. Concise description of the organization, how you came to be a member, and any other details you figure your reader needs to know about it.*
- 2. Why you think the organization had a culture, in the sense of the definition on p. 137 of Richmond & McCroskey.*
- 3. An inventory of the culture, using Schein's model on pp. 89-94 of Miller. Handle the three levels in the model by using three subsections.*

Week 14

April 19—Singing the Blues

- *Reading assignment for this class:*
Richmond & McCroskey—ch. 5, ch. 15.
Miller—ch. 11.
- *Don't forget your reading notes!*
- *Writing assignment for this class (#12):*

Most likely one of the barriers in ch. 5 of Richmond & McCroskey seemed particularly familiar to you. Write about your experience, both descriptively and analytically.

This assignment spec looks free-form, but that's just to give you flexibility in choosing a personal experience. Structure it with headings and subheadings just as you did in earlier assignments, and keep that good balance of description and analysis, too.

Week 15 (a/k/a Dead Week)

April 26—Show 'n' Tell, Hail and Farewell

- 501 students, do your literature briefings for us today.

Week 16

May 3—the Dreaded Final Exam...

Grading

Everything in the course is important to your grade. The reason is simple: everything in the course contributes significantly to your growth as a professional.

To put it bluntly, it's unwise to blow off any of the class meetings or any of the work. That said, here are the numbers which add up to your course grade.

Prompts, memos	50 points, in all
Reading notes	50 points, in all
Weekly Assignments	12 @ 50 points
Quizzes	100 points, total
Midterm Exam	100 points
Final Exam	100 points
501 students only: Literature Briefing	100 points

401 students:

A = 900 or better

B = 800 - 899

C = 700 - 799

D = 600 - 699

F = below 600

501 students:

A = 990 or better

B = 880 - 989

C = 770 - 879

D = 660 - 769

F = below 660

Second Chance Department...

Hey—everybody screws up, sometime.

If you want a do-over on a numbered assignment (like maybe you misread the spec, or didn't dig into it enough, or whatever), you have the option to turn in a revised version NLT the class after the one when I gave it back to you.

Got that? There's a time limit on this option.

Gimme both the *old-and-busted* version and the *new! improved!* version, and the latter will be your grade on that assignment.

Ground Rules, and Tough Love

I reserve the right to reject assignments after their deadlines pass. If you know you'll have trouble making a due date on any of the work, get in touch with me *before* the deadline so we can make some arrangement. The key to success in this course is simple: take the course seriously, and think ahead.

That makes the attendance policy obvious: *if you take this course, come to class*. The worst penalty for not showing up is losing the knowledge you would have gained from our activity that day, but you'll also lose the points you would have earned toward your course grade that day.

OK--that's the *tough* part. Here's the *love* part: if something is going on in your life that knocks you off your game, contact me *in advance* of a deadline so we can work something out. Keep in mind, though, that missing a deadline and making lame excuses afterward just won't cut it. If you blow it, admit it—and get it right, the next time.

You can understand what I mean, then, by calling this *tough love*. I want you to do well in this course. *But if I were to let you get away with doing less than your best, or to give you the impression that life is about doing the minimum necessary to get by, I'd be devaluing you*. Again, sincerity inspires respect. I want to earn your respect, and I hope you want to earn mine.

Remember that you are a student at a first-class state university, and this is a professional context for all of us. Be sure that the papers you turn in reflect your professionalism. All your formal written work must be typed, double spaced, with normal margins and font size. Be sure your name, the course number, and the assignment number are on the top of the page. Written work is *written* work; unless we make arrangements, email is *not* acceptable as a way to submit an assignment.

When you're having trouble with an assignment, don't suffer in silence. Call me! That's what I'm here for. My office hours are listed on this syllabus, and we can meet other times by appointment.

Here's what it all comes down to:

My job is to create an environment in which you can succeed.

Your job is to succeed.

but wait! there's more...

And Now a Word From Our Sponsor

The University wants to be sure you know about these things:

academic dishonesty policy

<http://www.marshall.edu/president/Board/Policies/MUBOG%20AA-12%20Academic%20Dishonesty.pdf>

computing services acceptable use policy

<http://www.marshall.edu/ucs/CS/accptuse.asp>

weather closings

http://www.marshall.edu/www/policy_07.html

accommodations for students with disabilities

<http://www.marshall.edu/disabled>

Policy for Students with Disabilities: Marshall University is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with physical, learning and psychological disabilities. University policy states that it is the responsibility of students with disabilities to contact the Office of Disabled Student Services (DSS) in Prichard Hall 117, phone 304 696-2271 to provide documentation of their disability. Following this, the DSS Coordinator will send a letter to each of the student's instructors outlining the academic accommodation he/she will need to ensure equality in classroom experiences, outside assignment, testing and grading. The instructor and student will meet to discuss how the accommodation(s) requested will be provided. For more information, please visit <http://www.marshall.edu/disabled> or contact Disabled Student Services Office at Prichard Hall 11, phone 304-696-2271.

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