Course syllabus

Groups and teams are thought to be the “building blocks” of today’s work organizations. They can take the form of task forces, production teams, project teams, management teams or action teams. What they all have in common is that those in charge of the organization believe that the best way to get the job done is to have employees work together as members of groups or teams in order to deliver a product or service. However, as often as work groups or teams do function effectively, there are an equal number of cases where they fail to meet expectations.

The goal of the seminar is to acquaint students with the most recent research findings regarding the nature and dynamics underlying decision making in work groups and teams. We will focus on such things as the background of team members, the composition or make-up of the team, the kind of team leadership available and the impact of the culture and climate of the organization in which the team must perform. Class discussions and course assignments will stimulate students’ thinking about the kind of future research on team decision dynamics that would advance our knowledge in the area.

Professor: Richard Klimoski
Email: rklimosk@gmu.edu
Office: 214 Enterprise Hall
Phone: (703) 993-1828
Office Hours: Wednesday 3-4 (by arrangement only)
Course Uses Blackboard: http://mymason.gmu.edu

Goals

As a result of taking this course, you will be able to:

- Describe the major forces that influence the behavior of individuals in groups and the dynamic of groups that affect influence behavior.
- Read and interpret technical papers regarding group dynamics
- Understand the logic of research on groups such that you will know when and why to trust the results reported in studies.
- Describe and interpret the dynamics of groups that you observe or of which you are a part.
- Be more effective in designing, participating or leading groups

Course Standards

As participants in an honors course I will expect you to take responsibility for learning and performing well. This will involve a commitment to expend the effort required to carefully read and master course material and to ensure the timeliness and quality of assignments. Because we will be using a seminar format, you should also be prepared to fully participate in class discussions and in doing so, to contribute to the learning of your class mates.

Learning teams

The class will be divided into learning teams. The members of each team will be expected to work together in order to produce a set of assignments.

Assignments

Individual Assignments

Text. The chapters assigned for each session should be read carefully for understanding. You should read with the goal of being able to discuss (with notes) the topics covered. Special attention should be given to learning and being able to apply the concepts and models presented in the text.

1. Articles: For most meetings, you will be expected to locate and read a scientific article in the journal Group Dynamics. This journal offers a set of papers in each issue that summarizes cutting edge research findings on groups and teams. The choice of the article to present will be yours. But the topic should correspond to the issues of group dynamics that we will be covering in class at the time. You should prepare and submit a summary of the article according to the format provided via Blackboard by the date assigned and also bring a hard copy to class.
2. **Articles briefing.** During our class sessions you will be expected to describe the article that you read and then go on to entertain questions. The goal will be to ensure that the other students in the class are fully briefed. Guidance on how to do this will be provided. But your briefing should be sufficiently detailed to include such things as the study’s purpose and why the topic is important, the research methods employed, the way that the study contributes to our knowledge or how the results might be applied by managers.

3. **Participation.** This is at the core of a good honors seminar experience. You will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the material assigned in our text as well as to pose questions or otherwise engage fellow students in discussions regarding the articles that they choose to present. You will also have many opportunities to add value to class sessions by sharing your views and critical analysis regarding the material that might present.

4. **Peer Assessment.** A brief survey will be administered toward the end of the semester to all students in the class in order to assess perceptions of how effective you were in class presentations or discussions. This survey will be anonymous and its results confidential. The survey results will be summarized and the findings presented to you privately in order to provide some developmental feedback. The results will also provide a component of your participation score for the course.

**Team Based Assignments**

5. **Team charter.** As part of the formation of the student learning teams for the course, members will be required to create a team working agreement or charter. Details on how to do this will be provided.

6. **Term paper (Research Proposal).** A major course requirement will be to produce a research proposal. This will involve the creation of a design for a study aimed at investigating an aspect of group or team dynamics. You can choose the topic because it is personally interesting to you. But you should also select a topic because you feel that the research evidence that we have so far is incomplete, because you feel that the topic is important to promoting the functioning of society or because more research is needed in order to help us gain a better understanding of behavior in the world of work. Thus in your proposal you must make a case that the results of the proposed study can contribute in some way to our knowledge of groups or teams. The paper will be written with enough detail that someone could actually carry it out were we to have the time or the resources. In order to give you a head start, this proposal will build on an actual study published in Group Dynamics. Details for what is expected can be found on a separate assignment document.

   a. **Draft 1: Paper topic and research questions.** For this part of the assignment you will be required to identify the topic of your research proposal. In addition to clearly specifying what you want to study, you will be expected to make a case that it is indeed worth studying (from a scientific or societal point of view). Among other things, you will present the kinds of questions that the study will address and the reasons that you feel that the study should be conducted. Details can be found for what is expected can be found in a separate assignment document.
b. **Draft 2: Paper study design.** A second interim deliverable involves a description of the method, measures and procedures that your study would follow. As noted, these should be derived from the article on which you are building your study.

7. **Presentation of proposal.** Student teams will have an opportunity to present their proposal to the class at the end of the semester. Guidance will be provided on how to do this.

8. **Exercises.** Note that you will occasionally be asked to participate in class exercises and cases which are designed to illustrate key points regarding group dynamics. But these will not involve any preparation or written work, nor would they be graded.

**Grading Recap**

Articles (submitted and briefed): 20%

Team Charter: 10%

Term Paper Draft 1- proposal topic/rationale: 10%

Term Paper Draft 2- proposal study design: 10%

Research proposal presentation 10%

Term Paper (Research proposal): 20%

Class participation: 20%

**Grades**

There are basically three grades that you could aim for:

**A:** You show personal and professional growth and have made serious contributions to the classroom environment.

**B+:** Solid performance, demonstrating mastery of material, generally a positive contributor to the class.

**B:** Demonstrate comprehension of the material, contributions to the class have been limited

**C:** Represents failure to engage and to perform as required in order to be seen as effective student in an honors course.

**Logistics**

**Appointments and e-mail.** I strongly urge you to contact me to ask questions, clarify assignments, or obtain additional help. It is best to contact me via email to set up a phone or in-person appointment (rklimosk@gmu.edu).
**Special Accommodations.** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

**Inclement Weather.** In the event of inclement weather, please consult Mason’s website or call the main information line (703.993.1000). If the University is officially closed, our class will not meet. If the University remains open during an inclement weather event, our class will meet as scheduled, unless you receive an email from me to the contrary.

**Cell Phones, Pagers.** These items are to remain off and put away during the entire class.

**Community standards of behavior**

The mission of the School of Management at George Mason University is to create and deliver high quality educational programs and research. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni that participate in these educational programs contribute to the well-being of society. High quality educational programs require an environment of trust and mutual respect, free expression and inquiry, and a commitment to truth, excellence, and lifelong learning. Students, program participants, faculty, staff, and alumni accept these principles when they join the School of Management (SOM) community. In doing so, they agree to abide by the following Community Standards of Behavior:

- Respect for the rights, differences, and dignity of others
- Honesty and integrity in dealing with all members of the community
- Accountability for personal behavior

Integrity is an essential ingredient of a successful learning community. Ethical standards of behavior help promote a safe and productive community environment, and ensure every member the opportunity to pursue excellence. SOM can and should be a living model of these behavioral standards. To this end, community members have a personal responsibility to integrate these standards into every aspect of their experience at the SOM. Through our personal commitment to these Community Standards of Behavior, we can create an environment in which all can achieve their full potential.

**Honor system and code**

The Honor System and Code adopted by George Mason University will be enforced for this class. I take honor code violations very seriously and will not hesitate to forward all suspected violations to the Honor Committee for review and adjudication. For a full description of this code please refer to the following url: [http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=1039#Honor](http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=1039#Honor)
Course outline/schedule

January 25
   Welcome
   Orientation
   Exercise
   Text: Chapter 1

February 1
   Studying groups (research methods)
   Text: Chapter 2
   Article 1 due
   Team Charter preparation materials due
   Teams assigned

February 8
   Group Formation and development
   Text: Chapter 3,4,5,6
   Article 2 due
   Team Charter due

February 15
   Influence and interaction
   Text: Chapter 7,8,9
   Article 3 due

February 22
   No class
   Team exploration of potential research topic/research questions

February 29
Working in groups: Performance
Text: Chapter 10
Article 4 due

March 7
Working in groups: Decision making
Text: Chapter 11
Article 5 due
Draft 1: Research topic due

March 14
No class-Spring Break

March 21
Working in Groups: Teams
Text: Chapter 12
Article 6 due
Draft 2: Research topic due

March 28
Conflict In and Between Groups
Text: Chapter 13, 14
Article 7 due

April 4
Context Matters
Text: Chapter 15, 16, 17
Article 8 due

April 11
Presentations

April 18

Presentations

April 25

No class

May 2

Presentations

May 4

Term paper due (may be submitted earlier)