COMM 4510-001: SENIOR SEMINAR IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION:
COMMUNICATION & HUMAN RELATIONS
(5:00–7:30 pm, Tuesdays, Hellems 141, Spring 2016)

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Course Description

This course employs communication concepts, principles, and practices to develop participants’ abilities to understand, evaluate, and improve their interpersonal and group communication. Specifically, the course provides opportunities for students to understand more fully, critically reflect on, and enact alternatives to taken-for-granted concepts, principles, and practices that, typically, are associated with interpersonal communication in dyadic and small group settings, by participating in creating and understanding how they created high-quality interpersonal communication and relationships with other class members.

Course Process

Although the goals of this course are similar to and extend those addressed in introductory communication courses (e.g., COMM 1600: Group Interaction and COMM 2500: Interpersonal Communication), the processes by which these goals are accomplished make this course unique. First, the courses functions as a seminar, which is an advanced course that brings together people with basic grounding in a field to engage in group discussion, with everyone present participating actively in discussions.

Second, this is a critical-thinking course that encourages critical (e.g., alert, astute, careful, discerning, discriminating, illuminating, incisive, insightful, intelligent, meaningful, penetrating, perceptive, and skeptical) reasoning, evaluation, and discussion. Critical-thinking core curriculum courses at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) address matters of controversy within a given field of study—in this case, controversies about interpersonal and group communication—with students learning about, assessing, and critiquing traditional key assumptions, concepts, principles, arguments, and practices; suggesting possible alternatives; and gathering and evaluating data (information) about those alternatives.

Third, these goals are accomplished using an experiential group method, an inductive form of learning in which people first experience something—in this case, interpersonal and
group interaction—and then analyze and evaluate that experience. Hence, group members first engage in and then examine critically interpersonal communication that develops in the group itself. Members’ goal is to cooperate together to develop appropriate procedures and practices for engaging in high-quality interpersonal communication and relationships in this group. Group members, thus, learn from interacting, from being involved in relating, from seeing how their efforts turned out, and from perceiving how their ways of communicating affected those outcomes. Through processing of group interactions, participants gather needed evidence to understand, assess, and critique traditional interpersonal and group communication assumptions, concepts, principles, arguments, and practices; and to suggest and experiment with alternative ways of communicating with others to create high-quality relationships.

Finally, a more deductive learning approach is employed at times, with group presentations given on relevant topics prior to engaging in structured experiential group interaction. This method is useful for analyzing how prior knowledge of taken-for-granted interpersonal and group communication assumptions, concepts, principles, arguments, and practices affects their enactment, and, potentially, it leads to alternatives being enacted.

**Course Readings** (All readings below are posted on the D2L course website: https://learn.colorado.edu; readings should be completed by the assigned date; additional readings will be assigned as needed)

**January 12**


**January 19**


**February 2**


February 23  Group 1 Presentation: Sharing Perceptions and Emotions in Communication and Human Relations Groups


March 1  Group 2 Presentation: Dealing with Difference and Diversity (e.g., Gender, Ethnicity, and Race) in Communication and Human Relations Groups


March 8  Group 3 Presentation: Expressing Verbal and Nonverbal Support in Communication and Human Relations Groups


March 15  Group 4 Presentation: Engaging in Conflict and Confrontation in Communication and Human Relations Groups


March 30


April 5


**Course Requirements** (Note: All papers should have 1-inch margins on all sides of the page and use 12-point Times New Roman font; all references should be cited using the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; see course website for information about constructing papers and citing sources using this manual.)

**A. Response Papers** (30%: 5% first evaluation period, covering January 12–January 26; 10% second evaluation period, covering February 2–23; 15% third evaluation period, covering March 1–April 5): Starting with the first session on January 12 through April 5, write at least a 1-page (but no more than 2 pages) typed, single-spaced (with double spacing between
paragraphs) response paper after each class session. Each response paper must be sent to me by e-mail in a Word for Windows file by Saturday 11:59 p.m. of that same week (if a response paper is sent to me on Sunday, a whole grade will be deducted for that particular entire set of response papers, such as from an A to a B; if a response paper is sent to me on Monday, two whole grades will be deducted for that particular entire set of response papers; after that, a grade of F will be given for that particular entire set of response papers.)

These response papers should not be a summary of what happened in the class session being examined but, instead, should reflect on and evaluate critically your actions and interactions in the experiential group discussions (e.g., explaining what you did and did not do during the interactions, how you felt about your actions or lack thereof, and, in the case of not doing what you wanted to do, what prevented you from doing so, and setting specific goals for the next class session), and, secondarily, on other interpersonal interactions that occurred during those discussions and the group interactions as a whole, with an emphasis on your reactions to those interactions (e.g., how they affected you and your perceptions of, and behaviors toward, group members who were involved). In discussing your (and others’) actions/interactions, these papers should reflect critically on whether and how actions/interactions being examined revealed controversies and taken-for-granted assumptions, concepts, principles, arguments, and practices about interpersonal and group communication; strengths and limitations of those taken-for-granted assumptions and practices; alternatives that were or could have been enacted; and strengths and limitations of those alternatives. Moreover, these response papers must draw on course readings, especially those essays read for a class session being reflected on in a response paper. Please reread your response papers and edit them for punctuation and clarity. The third set of response papers should contain, as a final, separate entry, a summary of what you learned in this course about interpersonal and group communication (both in general and with respect to your communication).

B. Analysis Papers (30%, 15% each; 7–10 double-spaced pages per paper, not including references)

1. First Paper (due February 15): Compare beginning stages of communication and human relations groups discussed in the readings for February 2 with the way that our group has developed. In the first part of the paper, synthesize assigned readings to describe and/or propose a model of communication and human relations group development; in the second part of the paper, evaluate critically how our group has and/or has not developed according to that model (citing specific examples of group interaction), and what the future probably holds for our group’s development.

2. Second Paper (due April 12): Compare ideas about communication and human relations group leadership discussed in the readings for March 30 with behaviors demonstrated in this group by the facilitator (Larry) and the facilitators-in-training (Adam and Nicole), and, secondarily, by any other members (including you). As with the first analysis paper, in the first part of the paper, synthesize assigned readings to describe and/or propose a model of communication and human relations group leadership; in the second part of the paper, critically evaluate how the facilitator and facilitators-in training, and any other members,
have and have not enacted aspects of that model (citing specific examples of behavior), and what leadership behaviors they each could and/or should demonstrate more.

C. **Application Paper** (20%; 7–10 double-spaced pages, plus references and appendix, due March 30): This course becomes more meaningful when it is made relevant to participants’ everyday lives; this assignment clarifies that connection by having you engage in and analyze critically an interpersonal interaction with a person who is not enrolled in this course that deals with topics, themes, and/or issues addressed in the course. First, select a person who is not enrolled in this course (e.g., a parent, significant other, roommate, or friend) to spend at least an hour with (preferably more), telling that person about the assignment and getting his or her agreement to participate. Second, prepare a list of 5–10 topics, themes, issues, and/or questions for the interaction (put that list in the appendix to the paper) that relate to (a) important course concepts (e.g., here-and-now communication, sharing of perceptions and feelings, verbal and nonverbal support communication, and conflict/confrontational communication), to find out how that person sees you, in general, with regard to these concepts and, specifically, with regard to your relationship with her or him; and to (b) significant feedback that you have received from class members (e.g., about your communication strengths and weaknesses), to check out whether this person sees you in those same ways, in general, or with respect to your relationship with her or him, in particular. This list is not meant to be used as an interview guide, with you asking questions and the other person responding; instead, this list simply contains helpful ideas to which you can refer as you interact and dialogue with the person. Hopefully, you will, at times, talk with that person in the here-and-now, sharing thoughts and feelings as they occur in the moments that the two of you are interacting. Third, write this paper more like an analysis paper than a response paper. Start with a clear introduction that establishes the nature of your relationship with the person and that provides the purposes of the paper and an overview of how the paper proceeds. Although there is no one way to write these papers, two important things to cover are what you learned about (a) yourself and your communication strengths and weaknesses, and (b) your ability to facilitate high-quality dyadic communication (including here-and-now communication). In discussing these issues, weave in course concepts/topics and readings (with a reference page for sources cited). Make sure to also construct a coherent conclusion for the paper. This paper should not simply state what you talked about or focus on the other person; the goal is to talk about what you learned about yourself as a communicator and as a facilitator of high-quality interpersonal communication.

D. **Group Oral Presentation** (20%; February 23–March 15): Students will be assigned randomly to a small group and one of four topics that is presented orally to the class (30 minutes plus 10–15 minutes for questions and answers). Each presentation should focus on the assigned topic in communication and human relations groups, in general, and in this group, in particular (as well as in your presentation group), explaining and evaluating the extent to which our group has engaged the topic, and offering concrete suggestions for how group members can better engage it, as aligned with the structured experiential activity that will be employed for that class session after the oral presentation (with presentation groups knowing that activity ahead of time).
E. **Attendance and Participation**: First, this course demands a significant amount of participation; to participate, of course, you must attend class sessions. Consequently, students are **allowed to miss only one class session** (a shortened response paper needs to be written that talks about your thoughts and feelings about missing that class session; otherwise, a whole grade will be deducted for that particular entire set of response papers); **after that, each additional absence results in the lowering of the final course grade by an entire grade** (e.g., from a course grade of B to C). Hence, please save that one absence for something important, such as an illness or travel. The final examination session (Tuesday, May 3, 7:30–10:00 pm) also is mandatory for all course members (the one absence cannot be used for that session); consequently, do not make any travel plans prior to that last session. This attendance policy is non-negotiable; hence, if you intend to miss more than one class session, please find another course to take. Second, at the end of the semester, each person will evaluate his or her participation in the experiential group discussions, and will be evaluated by the other group members and by me. If those three evaluations indicate that a person has contributed significantly to the discussions, that person’s course grade will be raised an entire grade (e.g., from a course grade of C to B). Moreover, if you attend all class sessions, your final course grade will be raised one step (e.g., from a course grade of C+ to B-). Thus, active participation (and attendance) in the group discussions can help, but not hinder, your course grade.

**Course Notes**

A. All written work for the course must be completed; failure to complete any assignment results in a grade of F for the course. In the case of a set of response papers that fails because a response paper was not turned in on time, that response paper still must be completed within a week of the last possible due date; otherwise, a grade of F will be assigned for the course. The last response paper in a set must be submitted, at latest, by the Monday following that session or a grade of F will be assigned for the course (see explanation about response papers above).

B. This course is an emotionally involving experience; indeed, communicating emotions that you feel at any given moment in the group’s life is one of the most significant features of this group work. Although there is an essential right of privacy (and, generally, the group does not talk about things occurring outside the classroom), your decision to stay in this course means that you have chosen to involve yourself with other group members and to participate in this group work. If you cannot make that commitment, please take another course. Moreover, because of emotional pressures that this course can exert, I will be pleased to meet individually with a member at any time. The relationship between us, however, is not one of therapist to patient; if therapy is desired, this course should not be taken! I assume that everyone is functioning in a healthy manner in everyday interpersonal interactions, but that everyone wants to develop greater abilities to communicate effectively; hence, the goal of this seminar is to increase everyone’s repertoire of interpersonal and group communication skills. If, however, you find after the first few weeks that this course is not for you but you cannot drop it and take another course, I will arrange for you to meet the course requirements via a volunteer communication and human relations activity (e.g., volunteering at a local residential facility). That arrangement, however, cannot be made after the first four class sessions, as there is not sufficient time to engage effectively in that alternate activity. Hence, please consider carefully from the start whether you really want to take this course and participate in
its work, especially given the number of students on the waitlist who want to enroll in this course.

University of Colorado Boulder Notes (Arranged alphabetically)

A. Classroom Behavior Policy: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race; color; culture; religion; creed; politics; veterans’ status; sexual orientation; gender, gender identity, and gender expression; age; disability; and nationalities. Course rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I gladly will honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on classroom behavior (http://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-classroom-and-course-related-behavior) and the student code (http://www.colorado.edu/osc/sites/default/files/attached-files/studentconductcode_15-16.pdf)

B. Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner, so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at (303) 492-8671 or by email at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see temporary injury guidelines (http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students/temporary-medical-conditions), and discuss your needs with me.

C. Discrimination and Harassment: CU-Boulder is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU-Boulder does not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. CU’s Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or related retaliation. CU-Boulder’s Discrimination and Harassment Policy prohibits discrimination, harassment, or related retaliation based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation, or political philosophy. Individuals who believe that they have been subject to misconduct under either policy should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OEIC) at (303) 492-2127. Information about the OIEC, the above-referenced policies, and campus resources that are available to assist individuals regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, or related relational can be found at the OIEC website (http://www.colorado.edu/institutionalequity).

D. Honor Code: All students enrolled in a CU-Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy (http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy) of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the
Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible of violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council, as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at http://honorcode.colorado.edu

Academic dishonesty in the form of cheating or plagiarism in all its forms—from using the ideas, organization, supporting sources, or words of another (including other students) without giving credit to the original author, to allowing or paying another person to write a paper for one’s benefit, to purchasing and using a prewritten paper for course credit, as well as using another person’s paper available on the internet—will result in a grade of F for the assignment, an F for the course, and referral to student judiciaries. Papers submitted by any student, written in part or in whole by someone other than that student, shall be considered to constitute fraud under the Honor Code, and result in the assignment of a grade of F for the course. Additionally, it is required that the work you complete for all course assignments be original. Unless you have my explicit permission, you are not allowed to submit work that you have completed or are completing for other assignments in this or any other course.

The development of the internet has provided students with historically unparalleled opportunities for conducting research swiftly and comprehensively. The availability of these materials, however, does not release students from appropriately citing sources or applying standard rules associated with avoiding plagiarism. Specifically, I expect to review papers written by students that draw ideas and information from various sources (cited appropriately), and that are presented in students’ words after careful analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. An assembly of huge blocks of other individuals’ material, even when cited, does not constitute an appropriate representation of this expectation. Uncited, plagiarized material shall be treated as academically dishonest, and will result in a grade of F for any assignment and for the course. If you are confused as to what constitutes plagiarism, review the CU-Boulder Honor Code on this topic and/or see me.

E. Observance of Religious Holidays and Absences from Classes or Examinations: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty members make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled examinations, assignments, and/or required attendance. In this course, I will make every effort to accommodate students who have such conflicts with scheduled assignments or attending class sessions, provided students inform me well in advance of the scheduled conflict. If an assignment is due on a religious holiday, it can be due on another day. Class sessions missed to observe religious holidays will not be counted as absences with regard to the participation grade. See campus policy regarding religious observances (http://www.colorado.edu/policies/observance-religious-holidays-and-absences-classes-andor-exams) for full details.