COM 577: Communication in Small Groups
Course Times: T/Th 3:30-5:20, Gould 117

Professor: John Gastil
Office: CMU 331, Phone: 543-4655
Email: jgastil@u.washington.edu
Office hours: Wed 10:30-11:30am, Th 2-3pm

Course Summary & Objectives
In taking this course, you will read books and articles addressing diverse topics in small group communication research, such as structuration, functional theory, democratic decision making, and relational communication in groups. Through reading and class discussion, you will learn some of the substantive findings and new ideas in recent theory and research.

You will also strengthen your research skills and clarify your own long-term research interests through the completion of an individual or joint research project. The emphasis in this course will be on the development of group communication theory, as well as the interplay of theory and research. The course will also teach importance lessons about the practice of scholarly writing. We will discuss how to write and submit articles to communication journals (and other social science publications). We will also discuss broader issues about the academic profession.

Assignments and Grading
Seventy percent of your grade will be based upon the quality of a 20-35 page paper that you will write either by yourself or in collaboration with other students during the quarter. Presentations on assigned readings and general participation in class accounts for the remaining 30% of your grade. You should attend every one of the scheduled classes and actively participate in class discussions by asking and answering questions, bringing up concerns or ideas, and carefully listening to what others say during class. You must also do your share of work in any joint project.

Readings
I have assigned three books, all of which are available at the UW bookstore:


The Frey handbook is quite expensive, but it’s a still-new hardback handbook—an invaluable resource that didn’t exist previously. We are very lucky that such a handbook has been written so recently. The Polletta book is a wonderful example of qualitative research methods, and it is also a new addition to the literature on the role of small groups in social movements. With the exception of the first day of class, you are expected to have done all readings before the corresponding class period. It is critical that you not only do the readings but also make notes of issues you wish to bring up in class. Discussions are dreadfully dull if you don’t come to class prepared and eager to talk (and listen). To help spark discussion, a student will be assigned to introduce the discussion of each of the articles and some of the chapters assigned.
Research Project
Throughout the quarter, we will be discussing, designing, then executing our joint and individual research projects, each of which will explore a theoretical issue in small group communication. Whether you are doing your research project mostly on your own or in collaboration with other students is up to you and your fellow students. In every case, I will assist you in the design and execution of your research, and we will meet outside of class to discuss the progress of your research. The schedule of activities is as follows:

Week 1 Overview of the purpose/design of projects
Week 2-3 Select research topics and questions
Weeks 4-5 Refine questions and explore relevant literatures
Week 6-8 Clarify and develop original ideas or research designs
Week 9-11 Finish writing research papers

We will regularly devote class time to discussing the progress of our ideas and methods. Though we will spend much of our time discussing the readings, part of every class period will involve conversations about our projects. In week 10, you will get a chance to summarize some of your main insights for class and will receive additional feedback.

When complete, your paper will be between 15 and 35 pages in length, including title page, abstract, text, references and any other material (appendices, figures, etc.). Refer to the APA Publication Manual for more details on paper composition, but you will also learn much by examining the organization and design of the readings assigned in this course. If appropriate, you will choose an appropriate journal as the target for your research and write a draft cover letter for submission of your manuscript. When writing your paper, you will need to take that journal’s particular requirements into account. Ideally, you will find an article in that same journal that is structurally similar to what you have in mind, and you can use it as a template for organizing your own paper.

Part I: Theory and Methods

Week 1
Introduction to the Course (Sept 30)


Introduction and History of Field (Oct 2)

Week 2

**An Overview of Different Theories (Oct 7)**


**Structuration and Synergy (Oct 9)**


Week 3

**Quantitative Approaches (Oct 14)**


**Ethnographic and Case Study Approaches (Oct 16)**


Part II: Decision Making and Juries

Week 4

Decision Making and Group Procedures (Oct 21)


There is no class meeting on October 23. Spend the class time catching up on any missed reading and working on a paper proposal, which will be due October 28.

Week 5

Introduction to Jury Deliberation: Background and Selected Studies (Oct 28)


Theories of Jury Decision Making (Oct 30)


Week 6

Information Processing and Sharing (Nov 4)


Status and Influence (Nov 6)


Part III: Difference and Relational Communication

Week 7

Gender (Nov 11)


Relational and Nonverbal Communication (Nov 13)


Week 8

Culture and Ethnicity (Nov 18)


There is no class meeting on November 20. Spend the class time catching up on any missed reading and working on a full paper outline, which will be due November 25.
Part IV: Groups in Society

Week 9: Small Meetings in Large Societies (Nov 25)


Week 10: Groups in Social Change Organizations (Dec 2 & 4)

Polletta, F. (2002). *Freedom is an endless meeting: Democracy in American social movements.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-4 for Tuesday and chapters 5-8 for Thursday.]

Week 11: Student Presentations (Dec 9 & 11?)

*If there are a large enough number of separate presentations, we will schedule a class session on December 11 at the same time and place. Please leave it open on your calendar.*