

# COM 345: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Spring 2009 (WEC)

Class meets in Music 22 on the following Saturdays from 1-5 pm:  
**April 4, April 18, April 25, May 9, May 16, June 6, and June 20**

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## GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Unless you decide to become a hermit in the Black Hills, most of you will spend a large portion of your adult lives working in, with, and among organizations. COM 345 is a course that attempts to understand the nature of communication in organizations. It operates from the premise that the way people communicate in organizations has considerable influence on how successfully organizations function. The content objectives include:

- (1) conceptually **defining the field** of organizational communication;
- (2) learning about **theories and models** of organizational communication;
- (3) communication **problems** peculiar to organizations;
- (4) the role that **leaders and managers** can play in dealing with these problems;
- (5) assessing **your own traits and tendencies** as a member of organizations; and
- (6) an initial understanding of contemporary **research** in organizational communication.

I regard the subject matter for this course as interesting and important, and I hope that I can convince you of that as well. As I see it, the hard reality is that there's a lot of "dysfunction" out there—literally millions of people go to work each day dreading what they are about to do. They aren't motivated; they are confused; they have conflicts with others; they don't know how to deal with those both "above" and "below" them in the organization. And organizations themselves are stressed, as the world changes politically, socially, economically, and technologically at a more rapid pace than ever before. Awareness and sensitivity to organizational communication theories, issues, and skills offers the potential to at least reduce the degree of organizational dysfunction in our world.

In general, my goal is to make each class count--I try to get something definite accomplished. I should also forewarn you that I will likely share some of my personal experiences in organizations. The goal here is not simply to "tell stories," but to bring organizational communication concepts to life. So please keep in mind that there is a "pedagogical reason" for these stories; do not regard them as simply a way to "pass the time."

## REQUIRED TEXT

- Katherine Miller, Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes, 5th ed. (Cengage, 2009). ISBN #0495565512. Since this is the only main text for the course, I would expect a fairly "close" reading of it.

- Please also note that some “outside reading” and research will be necessary in order to complete the writing assignments—that is assumed and expected.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Since WEC courses meet only seven times in the spring term, my expectation is that you won't miss any classes—certainly no more than one. Although there are no formal penalties for attendance, I will consider attendance as a grading criterion. As an absolute minimum expectation, I do want to make it clear that you cannot expect to receive credit for the course if you miss three or more classes, even if you do all of the work. Also, the "lecture" material for this course will generally not be a simple repetition of what is in the text; therefore, if you miss any classes, it is your responsibility to get the notes for them.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Late assignments are subject to penalties, with the exact penalty to be determined by the particular circumstances. And if you miss an exam, it is your burden to (a) demonstrate that your absence was legitimate, and (b) make alternate arrangements to take the exam. I realize that “stuff happens,” but the main message is this: I do not want to have to “track you down.” In short, it's your responsibility to contact me if there are problems—not the other way around.

## **PLAGIARISM**

Please remember that writing assignments can lead to issues involving plagiarism. We will discuss this matter in class, and please note that the relevant sections of the Augsburg Student Guide are at the back of this syllabus.

## **GRADING**

- Your final grade will be based on three exams and three writing assignments; they are described below.
- Your grade will be based on the total number of points you accumulate during the term. Essentially, I will make a "class curve," but I will also take into account:
  - (1) percentage of total points,
  - (2) how the point totals are clustered or distributed--i.e., if there are any "gaps" where it would be convenient to draw a line,
  - (3) college grade guidelines, which suggest that a 3.0 is achievement "above basic course standards" and a 4.0 is achieving "the highest standards of excellence," and
  - (4) any "intangibles," such as perceived competence, attendance, class participation, etc.
- In general, I use an "eclectic" method of grading, trying to make use of any available information that will help in determining grades. I should also note that I do not assume a "normal distribution curve"--in other words, I do not assume that the student with the lowest point total should fail the course, nor do I assume that the highest point total is automatically a 4.0 (although a 4.0 is clearly the most likely grade in this case). In general, though, I tend to be fairly generous on the "low end" of the grading scale (don't worry about failing if you do all of the written work and score at least 50 percent on the exams) and somewhat stingy on the "high end" (you'll need to really earn a 4.0). Although this sounds vague, I will try to give you feedback about grades along the way, and you are always free to consult me at any time during the term. Also, you cannot elect to "take a zero" on one or more assignments and expect to receive credit for the course.

## **GRADED ACTIVITIES (details subject to slight modification)**

### **EXAMS (200 points)**

These non-cumulative exams will consist of a combination of true-false, multiple choice, and short-answer questions--i.e., questions that can be answered in 1-3 sentences. At the end of the term, I will convert your total exam points to a 200-point scale. For example, if there turn out to be 180 points worth of exam questions, and you get 144 correct (80% correct), your exam score for the term will be 160 (80% of 200).

#### **Exam #1 – April 25**

**This exam will be based on:**

- (1) lecture and other "in-class" material from April 4 – April 18
- (2) Miller, chapters 1-4

#### **Exam #2 – May 16**

**This exam will be based on:**

- (1) lecture and other "in-class" material from April 25 – May 9
- (2) Miller, chapters 5-9

#### **Exam #3 – June 20**

**This exam will be based on:**

- (1) lecture and other "in-class" material from May 16 – June 6
- (2) Miller, chapters 10-14

### **IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THE EXAMS**

Although I do think it is important to "internalize" as much information as you can, I do not expect you to memorize every bit of information in this course. **Therefore, for each exam, you will be allowed to use both sides of one 4 x 6 note card (or 4 x 6 slip of paper) as an aid--put whatever helpful information you want on this "cheat sheet."** I suggest that you put troublesome or hard-to-remember information on these cards.

### **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (200 points)**

**I'm assigning three papers for the term, with certain educational goals in mind:**

- For paper #1, I want you to become more familiar with all that is "out there" and has been written in our academic journals.

- For paper #2, I want you to be able to do research and criticism on a particular subject relevant to organizational communication.
- For paper #3, I want you to demonstrate that you can apply a variety of course ideas to an analysis of a “real” organization.

**PAPER #1 – JOURNAL ARTICLE REPORT/CRITIQUE**  
**due April 18**

**(50 points)**

For this assignment, you want to acquaint yourself and the other members of the class with one article dealing with organizational communication. One requirement is that this article **MUST** be from an academic journal, but the article can be either quantitative or qualitative. (One place to look for such articles is in the “references” section of your own textbook, at the end of the Miller text. Remember that this should be an article from an academic journal, not a book.) **Please realize that you need to spend some time looking for an article with which you are comfortable—you should not assume that the first article you find will work.** In particular, an unacceptable stance for you to take would be, “I didn’t like this article and I thought it was pointless and confusing.” If that’s the case, then you have chosen the wrong article for you. In some ways, I am hoping that you have to look at a variety of articles in order to decide which one to write about—one goal of this assignment is for you to “see what’s out there,” and if you only look for one article in one place, then that won’t happen.

**Once you have found an appropriate article, you should do the following:**

1. Write a concise two-page summary of its main points.
2. Write at least one full page of your own thoughts as they relate to the article.
3. Present your findings, briefly and informally, in class on April 18. Limit yourself to about three minutes, and provide a one-page handout for the class to keep. These presentations are potentially “fair game” for the exam on April 25.

**Grading criteria:**

1. Ability to select an interesting, meaningful, appropriate article.
2. Ability to clearly explain what the article has to say.
3. Ability to provide a thoughtful analysis of the article.
4. Ability to share your ideas with the rest of the class, orally and in writing. (If you don’t make the oral presentation, you automatically lose 5 points; if you don’t have a handout, you lose 5 additional points.)

**PAPER #2 - REPORT/CRITIQUE ON ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE**  
**due May 9**

**(75 points)**

For this assignment, you should write an 8-10 page report/critique on one relatively narrow topic related to organizational communication. **You need to submit a topic choice in writing by April 25.** For example, you could consider general topics such as the following:

job interviews  
 communication audits  
 matrix organizations  
 organizational culture  
 motivating employees

performance evaluation  
 communication consulting  
 management by objectives  
 Japanese organizations  
 information overload

job satisfaction  
 leadership styles  
 network analysis  
 quality circles  
 systems school

telecommuting  
gender issues  
conflict management  
mergers/acquisitions  
trust in organizations  
implementing change

the Hawthorne studies  
nonverbal communication  
communication grapevines  
participative management  
using meetings effectively  
customer service

Total Quality Management  
public relations  
dealing with diversity  
technology & communication  
upward communication  
training in organizations

After you select a general topic, you would normally need to **narrow** it or **focus** it a bit; for example, “job interviews” might become “legal dimensions of job interviewing,” or “dealing with diversity” might become “dealing with Muslim employees in an organization.” For 5-8 pages, you should attempt to summarize, in plain English, a body of academic literature dealing with this topic. Then, in 2-4 pages, you should include an analysis/reaction to the literature. Does it “ring true”? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Is it consistent with other course material? What implications does it have for “real” organizations? The main idea is to make this more than a glorified “book report”; you need to offer analysis and a point of view. Since this is in part a literature review, you should include footnotes or in-text source citations and a bibliography using any standard style (such as MLA or APA).

**PAPER #3 - CASE STUDY OF AN ORGANIZATION**  
**due June 20**

**(75 points)**

For this assignment, you should write an 8-10 page analysis of a particular organization (or possibly, organizations) with which you are or have been affiliated. The ability to use course concepts meaningfully and appropriately is the central grading criterion. Keep in mind that given space constraints, you will have to have a specific focus--e.g., identifying the **culture** of the organization, assessing certain aspects of its **leadership**, examining its **performance appraisal** system, analyzing **gender-related** issues, examining **non-verbal** communication, etc. (Again, these are merely examples.) Also keep in mind that the reader will likely be unfamiliar with this organization, and that you’ll need to **support** conclusions that you draw--be specific and “document” points when you can. In short, this should be a “focused analytical thinkpiece” that will reveal your understanding of specified course concepts as well as the organization you select. You are not expected or required to be a “social scientist” and collect your own data about this organization, but at the same time, you may do so if you choose.

**DUE DATES AT A GLANCE**

April 18	Paper #1 due
April 25	Exam #1
May 9	Paper #2 due
May 16	Exam #2
June 20	Exam #3; paper #3 due

**ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY (from the Augsburg Student Guide)**

A college is a community of learners whose relationship relies on trust. Honesty is necessary for functioning of the Augsburg College community and dishonesty is, therefore, abhorred and prohibited.

One example of how trust is destroyed by a particular form of dishonesty is found in plagiarism and its effects. In its 1990 “Statement of Plagiarism,” the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Committee B on Professional Ethics notes that one form of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, “is theft of a special kind [in which] a fraud is committed upon the audience that believes those ideas and words originated with the deceiver.

Plagiarism is not limited to the academic community but has, perhaps, its most pernicious effect in that setting. It is the antithesis of the honest labor that characterizes true scholarship and without which mutual trust and respect among scholars is impossible.”

It is, of course, necessary that academic dishonesty be defined so that all concerned will know their responsibilities. The following guidelines are intended to help define academic honesty policies and describe the process involved in assuring adherence to these policies.

These policies and definitions are included in the Augsburg College Student Guide and the Augsburg College Faculty Handbook. Faculty members are encouraged to call attention to the policy in their syllabi and introductions to their courses and to note in their syllabi any specific concerns, additions, or penalties particular to their courses. **Nevertheless, it remains the responsibility of students to have read and understood these definitions and policies.** Students who do not understand these definitions and policies should seek assistance from their professors or the Offices of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College or Vice President of Student Affairs.

## Section I: Definitions

### 1. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is probably the most common and obvious form of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is defined in the Student’s Book of College English by Squire and Chitwood (Encino, California: Glencoe Publishing Co., 1975) as follows:

Plagiarism is the use of facts, opinions, and language taken from another writer without acknowledgment. In its most sordid form, plagiarism is outright theft or cheating; a person has another person write the paper or simply steal a magazine article or section of a book and pretend to have produced a piece of original [work]. Far more common is plagiarism in dribs and drabs; a sentence here and there, a paragraph here and there. Unfortunately, small-time theft is still theft, and small-time plagiarism is still plagiarism. For your own safety and self-respect, remember the following rules – not guidelines, rules:

**A. The language in your paper [or oral presentation] must either be your own or a direct quote from the original author.**

**B. Changing a few words or phrases from another writer’s work is not enough to make the writing ‘your own.’ Remember Rule 1. The writing is either your own or the other person’s; there are no in-betweens.**

C. Footnotes acknowledge that the fact or opinion expressed comes from another writer. **If the language comes from another writer, quotation marks are necessary in addition to footnote.** Other methods of indicating use of a direct quotation, such as indentation, are acceptable if they are commonly recognized.

D. A writer may not avoid a charge of plagiarism simply because the work from which material has been used is included in a citation somewhere in the writing. Each occurrence of the use of another person’s work must be cited.

### 2. Other Forms of Academic Dishonesty

Other forms of academic dishonesty include the following:

A. Using external assistance in the completion of course assignments and examinations unless such assistance has been specifically authorized by the instructor. Such activities as the use of “crib sheets” or “cheat sheets,” looking at another student’s answers during a test, and bringing examination books with notes or answers already written in them are forbidden. Assistance requiring authorization might include but is not limited to use

of technology (e.g., a calculator), use of books or notes during an examination, using professionally prepared materials, or having another person make specific suggestions for changes and corrections on an assignment. It is, for example, acceptable for a reader to suggest that a paragraph is unclear or needs more detail; it is unacceptable to offer specific rewording or details for inclusion. It is unacceptable to permit a typist or secretary to make changes or corrections in written material as part of the process of typing. Use of official college tutors or the Writing Lab for assistance is not ruled out by this section unless specifically forbidden by the instructor.

B. Handing in material for course assignments that has been, in large part, used to meet requirements in other courses without gaining previous permission by the instructor.

C. Presenting as one's own work what has been done wholly or in part by another person or a professional service without gaining the previous permission of the instructor. This prohibition includes but is not limited to allowing another person to conduct research or select written materials that will be used to complete an assignment, using a paper or assignment prepared by another student as an assignment in a previous course, or purchasing professionally prepared papers that may be handed in as purchased or used as the basis of a rewritten paper.

D. Failing to acknowledge that work which has not been assigned as collaborative work has been done with the inappropriate help of others. The prohibition is not intended to discourage legitimate cooperative or collaborative work. Nevertheless, legitimate collaboration must be distinguished from illegitimate collaboration. Unless the professor has instructed otherwise, it is dishonest to work with others on a single assignment that will be multiplied and turned in separately as if it were the work of each individual alone. All who cooperated on a project should be identified. Students need not be concerned about work that is assigned to be done collaboratively and follows the specific instructions of the professor.

**E. Fabricating research in the completion of assignments. This prohibition includes but is not limited to entirely or partial fabricating scientific research results or inventing information or citations for use in completing assignments.**

F. Interfering with the work of another student. It constitutes academic dishonesty to hinder the work of another student by stealing, destroying, changing, or otherwise interfering with their accomplishment of academic assignments. This prohibition involves but is not limited to such things as stealing or mutilating library materials or other academic resources.

G. Knowingly assisting another student to engage in academic dishonesty itself constitutes a form of academic dishonesty. Assisting in academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to such things as permitting another student to complete an assignment where such assistance is not authorized by the instructor, giving another access to a completed assignment which that student will submit as her or his own work, allowing another student to copy during an examination, and/or offering information to another student during an examination.

## **Section II: Sanctions and Procedures**

1. At the beginning of each course, professors will spend some class time explaining any areas of the Augsburg College Academic Honesty Policy which have particular relevance to a specific application in the course. The professor will offer students the opportunity to ask questions about the application of the policy in the course, then will distribute a form for students to sign and return. The form will carry the course title and date and the following statement: "I have read and understand the policies of Augsburg College regarding academic honesty. I understand how they apply to this course, and I pledge myself to abide by the policies and work to create an atmosphere of academic integrity on the campus."

2. Even the first occurrence of academic dishonesty by a student may result in a severe penalty, but normally a student's previous record will be considered by the faculty member in determining the appropriate penalty. The definitions above rather than any consideration of the student's intentions will be the determining factor in a judgment of academic dishonesty. Intention may be considered in determining the penalty.

3. A faculty member who makes a determination of academic dishonesty shall meet privately with the student involved to discuss the charge and the penalty. This meeting is intended to give the student the opportunity to understand the reason for the determination and to learn from the experience. It is also intended to give the professor the opportunity to gain information that may be useful in understanding the student's behavior and in deciding upon the penalty. In the event that such behavior occurs after the completion of classes (e.g., a term paper handed in near the end of classes), the professor may notify the student in writing.

4. Penalties imposed by the professor may include a "zero" or failing grade on the assignment or examination which involved the dishonesty, other academic penalties as outlined in the syllabus for the course or other statement of policies distributed by the professor, forced withdrawal from the course, or failure in the course.

5. The faculty member shall inform the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College in writing of a determination of academic dishonesty. This report shall include the name of the student involved; a brief description of the event, including supporting documentation, such as a research paper with plagiarized passages; and a description of the penalty. This material will be kept on file in the Dean's Office under the student's name. Faculty members, in the process of determining a penalty for an occurrence of academic dishonesty, should contact the Dean's Office for information on previous occurrences.

6. A single serious infringement of academic honesty or recurrent incidents of dishonesty may result in temporary or permanent dismissal from the College or withholding of the degree. Such penalties will be determined by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College in consultation with the faculty member(s) involved and the Vice President of Student Affairs.

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## **For the first class:**

1. Be sure to have purchased the textbook, and although there is no formal reading assignment, peruse the first four chapters.

2. Be thinking in advance of what journal article you might choose to report on for April 18. As noted above, check the "references" section of the Miller text for such sources. Academic journals can be accessed through the Lindell Library part of the Augsburg website.

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