

SPCOM 204: Leadership, Teams and Communication

Speech Communication, Faculty of Arts, Fall 2020

Professor Robert Danisch

Office Hours: Virtual Office Hours will be Thursday from 3:00-4:00 or by appointment.

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Course Description:

Leadership and teamwork are two of the most overused and least understood concepts circulating through our cultural moment. An overwhelming number of books, essays, and articles offer to explain leadership or teamwork and teach you how to be a better leader or teammate. It is presumptuous to teach a course about two such huge, complex, and vaguely understood topics. As part of the curriculum in a communication studies department, we will approach leadership and teamwork as mostly a matter of communicative competence. In this course students will become familiar with different ways of exercising leadership and acting as an effective teammate through communication practices. You will learn and apply leadership and teamwork skills in a hands-on practical way that encourages you to challenge your own beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes leadership and teamwork and in a theoretical and sophisticated manner that allows you to understand the underlying evidence, assumptions, and approaches to communication prevalent in the Western intellectual tradition. The emphasis is on application of concepts in actual professional settings and situations. Through a process of readings, self-discovery, group observations, and case studies, you will identify, observe, analyze, and apply new communication behaviors in order to become a better leader and teammate. This course is based on the premise that each student will face a variety of communication challenges in life. How these challenges are met, whether as a formal leader or a member of a team, can have a significant impact on an organization, on one's career, and on one's personal life. Learning more about communication will help every student meet their leadership and teamwork challenges. The methodology followed by this course will be one of knowledge acquisition, practice, and reflection. The learning objectives are designed to give you insights into communication theory and practice and how communication influences, or fails to influence, real world contexts.

Course Objectives:

- Students should develop a sense of the central philosophical and intellectual questions concerning the basic problems of communication and the complexity of communication as a constitutive process of making meaning.
- Students should have a working vocabulary of key theories of communication (working vocabulary means that you will have the ability to use these theories in practical ways as explanatory or interpretive tools).

- Students should practice, improve, and master some tools for becoming a better leader, teammate, and communicator. This includes becoming more responsive to audiences, becoming better writers and speakers, and using different media to create effective and engaging artifacts.
- Students will be expected to turn in polished, elegant writing that demonstrates a clear command of the readings, a distinct authorial voice, and a capacity for thoughtful reflection on complex ideas.
- Students will be expected to develop the ability to think critically, clearly and analytically. This means understanding the ideas and concepts raised throughout the course, their origins, strengths, weaknesses, and their relationship to larger themes in this class, in your education, and in your view of the world.
- Students will be expected to improve their abilities to read and listen critically, to respond reflectively and reasonably to others, and to distinguish successful and unsuccessful arguments.
- Most importantly, students should leave this class better prepared to take on a variety of leadership and teamwork roles and succeed in a variety of contexts.

Course Policies and Procedures:

- *Remote Learning and the Absence of the “Classroom”* – Normally this is a lecture/workshop course. That means I would usually deliver a lecture on the topics outlined on the course schedule and then try to carve out class time to get us all to practice some of what we are learning. However, we have a global pandemic and are now forced into a “remote learning” situation. This means we have no classroom and no time in a face-to-face setting. This makes teaching and learning far more difficult, and I do not believe your experience will be the same in this remote environment as it would be if we shared a physical space. The biggest challenge for remote learning is engagement. Even though we’ll all be staring at screens, I do not expect you to be passive consumers. I will be asking you questions, and I will expect you to ask me questions, and we’ll all have to work hard to seek out moments of connection and forms of engagement. I’ve devoted 25% of your course grade to acts of engagement with the material. We know that students learn more when they feel engaged in the class and connected to the instructor and other students. We’re also going to be split into small “teams” of 7-8 students each. These small teams will be your base of operations for the course and create opportunities for engagement, interaction, and the completion of assignments.
- *Attendance or Participation* – Normally I require attendance in my classes because your presence is mandatory for learning. However, we don’t have a traditional class with a meeting time so I will not be taking attendance, and there will be no way for me to be absolutely certain that you are regularly attending to the course material and engaging with me, your TAs, or others in the class. But you should be aware that the best way to do well in this course is to be engaged and attentive, whether in person or remotely. Inevitably, at the end of the semester, students who missed lectures, readings, or other chances for engagement do poorly, while students who consistently attend to the material and connect with the instructor and other students do well.

- *Academic Integrity* – I expect that the work you complete for this course will be your own, which is to say that cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any written assignment that borrows from other sources without giving proper credit or that is plagiarized in whole or in part from another source (including other student’s work) is grounds for an “F” on the assignment, or depending on the severity of the crime, is grounds for an “F” in the course.

Required Texts and Readings:

I like books - I like buying them, I like reading them, I like keeping them on my bookshelf, I like talking to people about them. Reading makes you smarter. You should read a lot. Reading carefully, critically, and analytically is essential for your success. This is a humanities course, and, therefore, it requires careful reading of complex and sophisticated texts. BUT. This course represents the least amount of reading I've ever used in my career. I've found lately that students read less. This is troubling but I'm adjusting. And now we have the circumstances of remote teaching and learning to complicate matters further. So I'm taking the very unusual step of asking each of you to purchase an electronic copy of a book I wrote about communication practices. This will serve as a kind of handbook for the course. In addition, I've tried to use a series of podcast episodes from a podcast that I host as mini-lectures to help you with this class. These are substitutes for more robust readings. I expect you to read the text and listen to the episodes posted during the weeks. I'll also post videos and readings that require your attention. Any readings aside from my book will be posted to the Learn site.

Assignments:

- 1) **Self-Reflective Communication Audit** – A communication audit critically assesses the specific communication practices of a particular person, team, or organization. The purpose of the audit you will do for this class is to show specifically where and how you can improve your leadership and teamwork communication competencies. You will design a tool for auditing any communicator by measuring specific communication competencies, and then you will ask four people that you know to use that tool to evaluate your own communication competencies. In other words, you will design a system for measuring leaders and teammates and their abilities in communication, and then get others to evaluate you with that system. This assignment will be worth 25% of your final grade and it will be due on December 5th.
- 2) **Deliberative Paper** – At the beginning of the semester, you'll get 2-3 partners to complete this assignment, which I call a deliberation. Together you deliberate about one of the key issues that we will be dealing with throughout the semester. Your “deliberation” is a sustained back and forth conversation between you and your partners that unfolds over several weeks and in which the three or four of you think through some controversial issue and some examples of what we have talked about in class. At the end of your deliberation, you and your partners will edit what you discussed and hand it in as a kind of paper. This assignment will be due on or before November 30th and will be graded on a scale of 0-100. You will receive explicit

instructions for the deliberation on Learn. This assignment will be worth 25% of your final grade.

- 3) **Experiential Tasks** – Each student will be asked to complete four experiential tasks. Experiential tasks are designed to help you practice what you have learned from class in real or simulated settings. The hope is to get students to become reflective practitioners of key aspects of leadership and teamwork, or at the least to critically reflect on the ways in which concepts or practices from the class work in real life settings. Essentially, you are being asked to use the material you have learned to do something in the world and/or to reflect on the ways in which the concepts from class work in the world. At the end of the semester, the four experiential tasks will be worth a total of 25% of your final grade.

- 4) **Discussion, Participation, Activities, Short Videos, and Class Interventions** – I’ve never rewarded students participation grades in a course before. But there’s a first time for everything and the pandemic requires some creative adjustments I suppose. So here goes: There’s a participation assignment sheet here in Learn. This assignment sheet lists a range of ways you can participate in this class (discussion posts, group synchronous discussions, activities, etc.). You’ll be asked to “participate” in class in a variety of ways 12 times throughout the term. Each of these acts of participation will be awarded 1-2 points for a total of 24 possible points. You’ll then get 1 free point for your 12 acts of engagement for a total of 25 points. This is the final 25% of your grade. To get 2 points on an act of engagement, it has to be substantive and thoughtful.

Grades:

- *Is this Class Going to be Easy?* - The students in this class represent some of the best and most capable young people in the province. Accordingly, I will expect a lot from you. You will not automatically be given an A because you have made an effort or because you are accustomed to getting high marks. C is an average grade, and in order to do better than that, you will have to produce better than average work. This means that you will go the extra distance, do the extra reading, prepare for classes by taking notes and formulating questions, make thoughtful interventions in class, submit careful and polished assignments free from careless errors, etc. There are no easy A’s and this is not an easy class.

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the four assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. I will then average the marks based on the percentage weights listed above. I do not like giving students numerical marks and I think it is an inferior system of grading. In my mind, I often think in terms of a letter grade. So that you know, your number out of 100 points translates into the following letter grades:

90-100 = A+	73-76 = B	60-62 = C-	0-50 = F
85-89 = A	70-72 = B-	57-59 = D+	
80-84 = A-	67-69 = C+	53-56 = D	

77-79= B+ 63-66 = C 50-52 = D-

- *What do the Grades Mean?* – Loosely translated the letter grades mean the following: an A+ is truly outstanding and spectacular work that goes well above and beyond the normal expectations of an assignment and demonstrates a complete mastery of the subject matter. An A or an A- is excellent and exceptional work. A grade in the B range is good to very good work that demonstrates a solid grasp of the material. A grade in the C range is average work that demonstrates a satisfactory but incomplete grasp of the course material. A grade in the D range is unsatisfactory work of poor quality. And an F is failing work that does not meet the minimum requirements for the course. Because grades in the A range are exceptional and grades in the C range are average, A grades are rare and difficult to obtain. I'm telling you this so that you know that if you earn a 75 on an assignment it means that I think the assignment is good not excellent. If you earn a 95, it means it's one of the best pieces of work I've have ever seen for this kind of class.
- *Extensions* – There are no extensions for any assignment. Assignments are announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you cannot make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. I am under no obligation to accept late assignments; assignments that are accepted may suffer a significant penalty (5 points for each day late).
- *Negotiations and Missed Assignments* - I do not haggle with students over grades, nor do I listen to declarations about why a student deserves an extra point here or there. You and I will not be negotiating your grade for the class – you will be earning a grade based on criteria that are explicitly stated in class. In addition, after the final grades are posted for the semester I will not re-mark or re-consider any grade from earlier in the semester. If you do not understand why you got a particular grade or why you lost points on a given assignment, you should come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me and I will explain your grade.

University Policies:

- **Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Check the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#) for more information.
- **Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For

information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

- **Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.
- **Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).
- **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with [AccessAbility Services](#) at the beginning of each academic term.
- **Mental Health Support:** All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health support if they are needed.

On Campus

Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655

[MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services

Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

[Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454

Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext. 6880

[Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247

[OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online on the Faculty of Arts [website](#)

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

- **Academic freedom at the University of Waterloo:** Policy 33, Ethical Behaviour states, as one of its general principles (Section 1), “The University supports academic freedom for all members of the University community. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base teaching and research on an honest and ethical quest for knowledge. In the context of this policy, 'academic freedom' refers to academic activities, including teaching and scholarship, as is articulated in the principles set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between the FAUW and the University of Waterloo, 1998 (Article 6). The academic environment which fosters free debate may from time to time include the presentation or discussion of unpopular opinions or controversial material. Such material shall be dealt with as openly, respectfully and sensitively as possible.” This definition is repeated in Policies 70 and 71, and in the Memorandum of Agreement, Section 6.

Course Schedule:

Week #1 –Introduction to the Course: What is Leadership? What is Teamwork? And What Do They Have to Do with Communication?

Conceptual Problem: What is communication?

Practical Problem: How do I get better at communication in order to be a better leader and teammate?

Read:

Robert Danisch, *What Effect Have I Had?*, “Preface: What is Communication?” pages 1-11.

Listen:

Episode 001 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-001>

Week #2 – Your Professor Provides an Evidence-Based Model for Effective Leadership and Teamwork

Conceptual Problem: What are the constitutive features of effective leadership communication and teamwork?

Practical Problem: Evaluate yourself. Are you any good at leadership communication or teamwork?

Listen:

Episodes 062 and 063 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-062-what-makes-an-effective-leader>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-063-why-we-should-balance-warmth-and-directness>

Week #3 – Relational Communication and Emotional Intelligence, or The Basics of Interpersonal Communication

Conceptual Problem: What is resonance, and how do our emotions influence and bias our communication? What are the central considerations in effective interpersonal communication?

Practical Problem: How do I improve my relational communication competencies?

Read:

Robert Danisch, *What Effect Have I Had?*, “Be a Better Partner” pages 12-63.

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013): 3-32 and 91-112.

Listen:

Episodes 002, 004, 005 and 021 of *Now We’re Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode002>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-004>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-005>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-021>

Week #4 – Small Group Communication, or the Basics of Teamwork

Conceptual Problem: What’s the difference between teamwork and interpersonal communication? What makes small group communication so complex?

Practical Problem: How do I improve my small group communication skills?

Read:

Robert Danisch, *What Effect Have I Had?*, “Be a Better Teammate” pages 64-109.

Listen:

Episodes 008, 010, 030, and 031 of *Now We’re Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-008>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-010>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-030>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-031>

Week #5 – Functional Communication and Reasoning Together

Conceptual Problem: What are the central characteristics of effective functional communication?

Practical Problem: How do I reason well with others?

Read:

Robert Danisch, *What Effect Have I Had?*, “Be a Better Leader” pages 203-248 .

Listen:

Episode 052 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-052>

Week #6 – A Primer on Persuasion

Conceptual Problem: How central is persuasion to leadership? What are the central features of persuasive communication?

Practical Problem: How do I become more persuasive? How do I use semiotic tying, narrative, attention, repetition, and the other tools of persuasion to better effects?

Listen:

Episodes 054, 055, and 066 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-054-attention-is-persuasion>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-055-repetition-is-persuasion>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-066-masters-of-communication-control-the-chain-of-signification>

Week #7 – Questions Are Often Better Than Assertions

Conceptual Problem: What's the difference between pull tactics of persuasion and push tactics? What can we accomplish with questions that we can't accomplish with assertions?

Practical Problem: How do I ask good questions? How can I become a better interlocutor and catalyze conversations through questions?

Read:

Edgar Schein, *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013): 7-68.

Listen:

Episode 048 and 051 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-048-how-to-lead-by-asking-good-questions>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-051-is-assertion-really-the-best-method-of-persuasion>

Week #8 – Trust and Transparency

Conceptual Problem: What is trust and what role does trust play in determining who leads?

Practical Problem: How do I get others to trust me? How can transparency help produce trust?

Read:

Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (University of Chicago Press, 2004): 119-186.

Listen to: Episode 057 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-057-trust-ethos-and-transparency>

Week #9 – Living with, and in, Uncertainty

Conceptual Problem: What are the advantages of uncertainty and the disadvantages of certainty? How do we make ourselves prone to decision-making mistakes by assuming too much certainty?

Practical Problem: How do I get better at living with, and seeing, uncertainty? How can I stay attuned to uncertainty in order to make better decisions?

Read:

Jamie Holmes, *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing* (Penguin Random House, 2015): 19-61 and 130-154.

Listen to: Episode 060 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-060-leadership-uncertainty-and-closure>

Week #10 – Framing, Vision, and Strategic Thinking

Conceptual Problem: How does word choice construct and map the world for us? Why is it important for leader's to have a vision? What does it mean to think and communicate strategically?

Practical Problem: How can I usefully and tactically frame and re-frame situations I enter? How do I articulate my rhetorical vision? How do I become a more strategic thinker and communicator?

Read:

Gail Fairhurst and Robert Starr, *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 1996): pp. 1-126.

Listen:

Episode 022 and 076 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-076-strategic-communication>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-022>

Week #11 – Acknowledging, Affirming, Absorbing & Making Distinctions, Offering Reasons, Anticipating Objections (or how to balance emotional connection and decision-making)

Conceptual Problem: Effective leadership actually involves and requires two different, competing skill sets. We must, therefore, learn to balance these skill sets in order to lead. Why?

Practical Problem: How do I acknowledge others, affirm ideas, absorb emotions, make distinctions, offer reasons, anticipate objections, and generally balance emotional connection and effective decision-making?

Listen:

Episodes 058, 059, 071, and 074 of *Now We're Talking*, found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-058-the-power-of-making-distinctions>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-059-the-power-of-acknowledging-and-affirming>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-071-repair-attempts-face-saving-and-de-escalation>

<https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-074-the-importance-of-absorbing-diffusing-and-suspending>

Week #12 – Phronesis and Experience

Conceptual Problem: Leadership is not like mathematics, and can only be learned through reflective practice. How, then, can we educate a reflective practitioner that acquires experience and gains wisdom or judgment in the course of acquiring experience?

Practical Problem: How can you begin to engage in reflective practice so as to become a better leader? How might your experiences be used as a resource for continued improvement?

Read:

Donald Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (Jossey-Bass, 1987): 22-40, 157-172, and 305-326.