



COMM 3920: Organizational Communication

Dr. Lori Byers

Fall 2026

MW 11:10 – 12:20

Office Hours: GAB 332, MW 8:15 am – 9:15 am and by appointment

Contact via Canvas

Course description:

Principles of communication applied in the organizational environment. Focus upon diagnosis, analysis, and resolution methods to communication-based problems with organizations.

Aspirations for this course:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Articulate how organizations and organizational cultures are socially constructed through communication practices.
2. Recognize and explain the role of communication theory in understanding human behavior and communication within organizational contexts.
3. Explain the evolution of organizations across historical contexts.
4. Analyze and evaluate common beliefs and practices of organizations.
5. Examine and reflect upon your own assumptions and behaviors regarding organizations in which you participate.
6. Diagnose communication challenges in organizations and recommend productive solutions.

Required reading list:

Text:

Miller, K., Barbour, J., Woo, D. (2025). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes* (8th edition). Cengage.

Additional readings (more TBA):

Avery, J., & Green, R. (2023, May-June). A new approach to building your personal brand.

Harvard Business Review,

<https://hbr.org/2023/05/a-new-approach-to-building-your-personal-brand>.

Clifton, D. (2020). *Now, discover your strengths: The revolutionary Gallup program that shows you how to develop your unique talents and strengths*. Gallup Press.

Epley, N., & Kumar, A. (2019, May-June). How to design an ethical organization. *Harvard*

Business Review,

<https://hbr.org/2019/05/how-to-design-an-ethical-organization>.

Gallo, A. (2023, February 15). What is psychological safety? *Harvard Business Review*,

<https://hbr.org/2023/02/what-is-psychological-safety>.

Hoffman, B. (2023, April 30). Overcoming confirmation bias. *Forbes*,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brycehoffman/2023/04/30/overcoming-confirmation-bias>.

Landry, L. (2019, April 3). Why emotional intelligence is so important in leadership. *Harvard*

Business School Online,

<https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership>.

Assignments:

Unannounced Reading Quizzes (10 X 10 points = 100 points)

We will have quizzes over the readings, often at the very beginning of class.
If you do the readings, you will succeed.

Individual case studies X 2 (100 points each = 200 points total)

Individual case studies involve analyzing and discussing specific communication issues and/or opportunities. We will discuss each case study assignment in depth in class.

You will write thorough yet concise essays to:

- 1) describe the situation/opportunity with appropriate detail,
- 2) apply what you have learned in class and in our readings,
- 3) advance knowledge and provide insight by including additional sources and information,
- 4) analyze the situation, and
- 5) recommend ways to advance/improve/evolve the situation/opportunity to become better organizational members and leaders in the future.

Essay and matching exams X 3 (100 points each = 300 points total)

You will have three opportunities throughout the semester to demonstrate your retention of course content through short essay questions and matching questions. I will provide summaries of potential content during each class meeting, and we will review content before each exam. If you complete all readings and attend class you will excel on the exams.

Applied organizational project proposal meeting (100 points)

Meet with me to discuss your ideas and your plan. Email me at least 48 hours before we meet so I am able to provide constructive and meaningful feedback.

Applied organizational project proposal (100 points)

Objective:

Submit your initial ideas to receive feedback and ideas for a successful and meaningful project.
This assignment is similar to what one might present to a potential client.

At a minimum, you must:

- 1) Identify your "client." Whose problem is it and why is this problem worthy of your time?
- 2) Identify your target audience. Why is this your target audience? What makes this audience distinctive, interesting, and important?
- 3) Identify and explain the problem thoroughly. Give examples, explain why it is a problem, and explain the importance of solving the problem. What makes this project worthy of your time?

Applied organizational final project (200 points)

Objective:

Solve an organizational problem related to your professional goals while applying course concepts.

Examples:

- Design a communication campaign around a social problem or issue related to a local organization.
- Create a culture plan outlining ways to improve employee morale.
- Help a nonprofit gain more donations or achieve other attendance/engagement goals.
- Design a leadership plan for a small business to decrease turnover and/or increase customer loyalty.
- Develop a training plan to improve employee relationships with each other and/or with leadership.

At a minimum, you must:

- 1) Identify your "client." Whose problem is it and why is this problem worthy of your time?
- 2) Identify your target audience. Why is this your target audience? What makes this audience distinctive, interesting, and important?
- 3) Identify and explain the problem thoroughly. Give examples, explain why it is a problem, and explain the importance of solving the problem. What makes this project worthy of your time?
- 4) Identify and explain your solution thoroughly. What makes your solution distinctive compared to other solutions? Why are current solutions not working as well as your solution will work? Go into detail explaining why your solution ideas are absolute genius.
- 5) Include organizational communication research and best practices to help solve your problem. How do research and case studies inform us to help us solve the problem? Justify your genius solutions with research and other successful examples.
- 6) Provide specific examples of best practices to provide as a playbook/guide for what your target audience should do (and possibly even bad examples of what not to do). Create a guide/playbook that explains everything your client should do to sustain your plan over time when you're no longer around.
- 7) Create a product that demonstrates your strengths and talents. This assignment should not be something that only exists between you and me. It should be something that you want to share with others and that represents the best of what you've learned throughout your educational career.
- 8) Cite a minimum of ten credible sources not used in class.

Reading for Wednesday, 8/19:

Chapter 2 in Miller, Barbour & Woo