

CSUS 325
Study and Practice of Communication for Sustainability (W)

Spring 2015

Tuesdays & Thursdays 4:10 – 5:30 p.m. (+ outside lab work)

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Official Paper Size for Printing: US letter (not A4)

Office Hours: by appointment (weekly calendar posted on office door; sign in open slot at least 24 hours before appointment and/or e-mail a “heads up” message requesting an appointment); for students with such diverse circumstances, a single set of 2 hours/week will never meet everyone’s needs.

Official Course Communication System: email (MSU address is the official university communication system; ANGEL will be used one last time. (ANGEL & D2L pull your MSU address; check your email regularly)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog:

Communications techniques for community engagement. Impacts of new and emerging communication tools. Facilitation principles and practice. Science and risk communications. Grant writing.

Expanded

This course will help students understand principles of and develop skills in oral, written and digital communications as applied to a wide range of community engagement and organizational applications. We will explore and use both traditional and emerging communication tools in efforts to address needs and communication use patterns of diverse audiences. Students will be introduced to facilitation principles and selected practical tools/procedures. Some time will be given to understanding how to select appropriate messages and strategies to communicate complex science-based messages as a way to help diverse audiences make their own decisions based on personal and societal risk assessments. This involves understanding differences between writing for scientific audiences and other audiences (and involves translating science for lay audiences).

The course will be structured around three broad areas:

1. Exploring fundamental principles of effective communication (incorporating basic professional courtesy and expectations);
 2. Developing and applying (practicing) skills in oral and written communication;
 3. Understanding and applying a communication strategy (using community engagement tools) to a community issue of your choice (small group); and
 4. Planning communication strategies to accommodate persons with disabilities.
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Course Learning Outcomes:

During this course, students will explore and apply the following ideas in communications:

- principles and practices of oral and written communications;
- justice issues concerning sustainability issues (e.g., climate, water quality, waste disposal) and the public “good;”
- roles of public participation around and media coverage of sustainability issues;
- roles of scientific findings and their relationship with advocacy rhetoric regarding sustainability; and
- differences between scientific communication (oral and written) and communication for a variety of other audiences, and practice both.

ATTENDANCE

To get the most out of this course, you must attend class. If you know ahead of time that you will miss a class, notify the instructors in writing or by e-mail before the date you will be absent. There are many legitimate reasons for missing class. Hospitalization (documented) or death of an immediate family member (documented) will be considered excused absences. Flat tires, non-essential field trips, early departure for spring break, and court appearances will not. You will be given one “*Get Out of Jail Free*” card to excuse one of these normally unexcused absences.

The instructor notes attendance every day. Regular attendance and participation have a definite bearing on grades, especially those that teeter on the edge of the grading scale. Additionally, because much of the course involves in-class activities, discussion, “writing for learning” pieces, and critique of peer work, participation is critical. Attendance is particularly critical on days when assignments are due, when we have guest speakers, and when your colleagues are giving presentations.

You are responsible for obtaining any information or materials missed due to absence.

WRITING

This course is designated as a writing course, so quality and clarity of writing is emphasized throughout the course. You will learn about differences in writing styles for different audiences and in different modes (for example, texting your friend about going to the movies is different from writing a professional email, which is different from a thank you letter, which is different from a scientific abstract, which is different from a blog or a Tweet). Throughout the course, you will be asked to write short reflective pieces (“writing for learning”). Additionally, much attention will be paid to the actual writing components of all your projects and papers. Some of the writing will be technical (planning document), some will be scholarly, some will be for a lay audience. Regardless of format, all written work is to be professional, with attention paid to structure, clarity, grammar, spelling, punctuation, proper word usage, etc. Statements should be explicit, opinions and choices clearly justified, and ideas should be logically presented. One element critical to improving writing is the opportunity to revise your work. Such opportunities will be provided as much as possible. Feel free to request additional critique from peers and instructor.

Writing Hints and Oooooops Board

Throughout the semester, we will be collecting a list of “common errors” (spelling, word mix-ups, grammar) and posting them on a bulletin board (in room and electronically). You should pay special attention to avoiding such errors in your papers. Points will be subtracted from your base grade on assignments for mistakes made on items written on the class Oooooops Board and in the list of “common errors.”

Ooooooops Board: You may contribute to the Oooooops Board – and earn extra credit to be added to your final grade (.25 points per error) for finding such errors in print (e.g., newspapers, magazines . . . not other students’ papers). Submit copy of the printed piece (your name, date, article source, course number written top right) with error highlighted and labeled/explained, and with “how to correct the error” written on the bottom of the page. When more than one person finds the same “ooooops,” only the first person to submit it will receive the credit. You will be provided a “starting list” of writing hints, based on some of the common writing issues seen across papers in many courses.

Formatting Your Written Work

- **Backing up your work-** all work needs to be saved electronically, even when you are requested to bring a hard copy of your documents to class.
- Use **page numbering** for any document of two or more pages. Page numbers should be in the footer: place in the lower right corner on documents printed on one side of a page; place alternating left for even-numbered pages, right for odd-numbered pages on documents printed on both sides of a sheet.
- **Printing:** To conserve resources, you may print assignments on both sides of the sheet. If you do, be SURE to check for proper page numbering. Double space all your written documents.
- You may choose to use either a cover/title page (for long papers) or place such information in the header of the first page (short papers). Include your name, the course number (CSUS 325), the title of the assignment, and the due date/date submitted. These may be single-spaced when in a first-page header.
- Unless designing a visually graphic piece, use one inch margins on each dimension (except when using a first-page header; in this case, the top margin may be 1.5 inches).
- Ratio of title to body text should be no more than 1.5:1 (e.g. 18 point or smaller title for 12 point body text).
- **Section headings** (and all other style elements) should follow APA guidelines (6th edition, printing 2)
- Use **block paragraph** style (no paragraph indent; add an extra line between paragraphs); format should be left justified and right ragged.
- Cite references within body of the text. Use APA style guide (note that there are other style guides: e.g., Chicago, MLA, AP, Turabian).
- List and format references properly at the end of the document (APA style guide).
- Read. Re-read. Proofread. Have someone else proofread. Check grammar and spelling. Have someone else check grammar and spelling. Try reading out loud during one of your proofreading sessions. Submit.

Students who plagiarize others' work will receive no credit for the assignment. The instructor will enforce MSU policy on plagiarism as detailed in Spartan Life handbook. To plagiarize is to take the ideas or words of another person and pass them off as one's own. Students are expected to acknowledge the source of ideas they use in their written work, whether quoted directly or paraphrased. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism.

It will also be considered plagiarism and/or cheating if a student submits any paper written in whole or in part by someone other than himself or herself. Plagiarism or any other form of cheating in examinations or other work is subject to serious academic penalty (e.g., course failure and suspension or expulsion from the university).

Late Assignments

If the due date is on a class day, assignments are due at class time. Some on-line writing assignments may have due dates that are not on a day that class meets (e.g.: "submit to D2L drop box by 5 pm Friday"). Any assignment submitted after the posted due date and time will lose 20% of the possible points for that assignment. After 24 hours, the maximum grade is 50% of the possible points. Please consult the instructor if you do not understand this policy.

Students who miss class due to official MSU trips or events should make arrangements with the instructors to turn in ahead of time any assignments they will miss. Students who miss class for illness or other emergency should work with the instructor to arrange an appropriate turn-in date.

Class “Base Teams”

Class will be organized into teams, based on similarity of academic emphasis or interest areas, preferred out-of-class meeting availability (understanding that, although some team work can be done remotely and digitally, some team work requires that students meet in person), or other characteristics of similarity. Students will have access to this information in order to self-select teams. Team members will be responsible to and for each other throughout the semester. You should remind each other of due dates, critique each other’s work honestly and openly, pick up materials or provide class summaries to team members should they have to miss a class, and openly invite ideas from all members. You will use this group as a work team throughout the course.

Some of your projects and papers will be developed by yourself; others will be completed with base team members. Partners and project group members will be selected from within your “base team.” It is recommended that each team select a specific organization, business or agency related to their interest area so that you can address projects to this group (and the group’s or broader community’s associated issues related to sustainability) throughout the semester. Using a real entity, you will be able to more easily and effectively research possible target audience characteristics and will be able to contribute real projects based on real needs of the organizations.

Course Expectations and Student Responsibilities

Instructor and students both share responsibilities in a course.

Instructor responsibilities include:

1. **providing interesting, relevant, and effective learning opportunities** for students and to create an environment for exploration and creativity by students (no spoon feeding in this course) through structured, guided course approach;
2. **allowing and encouraging open discussion** and diversity of opinions to be expressed during the course;
3. **being fair** in assessment and evaluation;
4. **returning papers and projects in a timely manner**, including providing critique in a timely manner to enable students to revise and improve their work;
5. **being accessible** (in person, through email and phone);
6. **actively listening** to students, respecting their ideas while also challenge their thinking to broaden their ideas and perspectives; and
7. **challenging students to do their best** – and to stretch their skills and thinking.

Student Responsibilities:

The basic assumption of this course is that you will learn from a continuing process or rational conversation with your peers, and from actual participation in and production of real products and engagement processes. Within the courses are both **opportunities** and **responsibilities**. In this course you have the opportunity to learn and develop your skills. Your responsibilities are to maximize your learning (e.g., improve your intellectual understanding as well as you applied skills), to maximize and assist in the learning of your classmates (especially your team members), and to apply what you learn to your work. To take advantage of the opportunity and to meet your responsibilities, students are to:

1. **Master basic concepts, theories, and methods.** You are expected to know a great deal more after taking this course than you did before, and should be able to apply your knowledge and skills in practical settings. This includes reading and thinking beyond what is actually covered specifically during the in-class portion of the course. (We will not directly discuss and present everything in the course readings. Readings should provide the foundation for you to engage in in-class discussions and to apply the content to your projects.)
2. **Think critically about the course content** to gain understanding and insights. Additionally, as you plan and develop your projects, you should think critically as you match message content, language chosen, and approaches to specific target audiences to meet specific needs. For major projects that have multiple phases (e.g., major individual oral presentation; final small group project), as you progress to each new phase, you should think critically about further focusing, improving, and

refining your work – based on your and your peers’ critical thinking as well as on instructor feedback. *Increasingly sophisticated levels of development and polish are expected for each successive stage of project development.*

3. **Explain precisely to classmates (can be base team members) your learning, insights, and conclusions.** Your learning is not complete until you teach what you know to someone else and can describe precisely what you have learned and what you now understand.
4. **Ask others to share their knowledge, conclusions, and insights – and practice being an active listener.** The course is structured to provide some opportunities for this. However, you should make additional opportunities throughout the semester. When others do share with you, listen actively, elaborate by explaining how what you learned from them fits with your personal previous understanding. And be sure to thank them. Peer commentary and critique may be relatively new to you (as it most likely will be to others). So we are all learning together. Honest, open sharing and peer critique (both positive comments and suggestions for improvement) can provide positive learning experiences for everyone.
5. **Engage in intellectual controversy** by taking positions counter to those of your classmates (and instructor), developing and presenting clear rationale for your positions, challenging their reasoning and conclusions, and arguing (in a positive way, not in a negative, “attacking” way) the issues until you or they are logically persuaded. (This does not mean butting heads just for the sake of butting heads. This should be used as opportunities to develop skills in justifying and clearly presenting your ideas and perspectives, and allowing others to express theirs.)

Required Materials

The required textbooks for the course are:

Corbett, J.B. (2006) *Communicating nature: How we create and understand environmental messages*. Washington: Island Press.

Hardman, E. (2012). *Active Listening 101 How to Turn Down Your Volume to Turn Up Your Communication Skills*. Emila Hardman. (\$3 on Amazon)

The World Watch Institute (2013). *State of the world: Is sustainability still possible?* Washington: Island Press.

They are available from most online retailers. You will not need these books the first week of class so feel free to shop around for the best deal (usually \$30 or less). Other required readings in the form of articles will be announced at least one lecture ahead of time and will be available on course website. All readings must be completed prior to class for which they are assigned. Because a portion of class time will be devoted to the discussion of the readings, it is recommended that you bring the assigned reading to class with you.

Assessment

This class will **challenge you** to produce your best work, and it will not be easy to get a 3.5 or 4.0 (but also difficult to get a 0.0 or 1.0 if you are engaged actively throughout the semester and turn in your work on time). Some suggestions to help you do well in this course are provided here:

- Spend a considerable amount of time outside of class practicing and mastering course concepts and techniques.
- Utilize the resources provided in class, on the Web, in your texts. If you have questions about assignments, content, or critique comments, meet with the instructor BEFORE assignments are due.
- Take notes (period).
- Expect technology or software to fail or do something you do not want it to do. Plan for these hiccups, because “I couldn’t open the file” or any other technology-related excuse in this class is unacceptable. Plan ahead.
- Mastering software involves time and trouble-shooting. Plan for it.
- Proofread, proofread, and proofread. You are expected to write well. Substantial penalties will be assessed for grammar, spelling, APA style, and factual errors. (See “Writing” section.)
- Attend all scheduled classes and class activities!

Assignments and Project Weights (to be finalized by Week 2):

The following scale will be used for grades:

4.0	=	93.0% - 100.0%	Much above average
3.5	=	88.0% - 92.9%	
3.0	=	83.0% - 87.9%	Above average
2.5	=	78.0% - 82.9%	
2.0	=	72.0% - 77.9%	Average (<i>meets minimum course requirements</i>)
1.5	=	66.0% - 65.9%	
1.0	=	60.0% - 65.9%	Below average
0.0	=	below 60.0%	Much below average (miss class often, not engaged, projects not turned in, etc.)

NOTE: Failing to turn in even a SMALL, 5%-weighted assignments can significantly affect your grade (in other words, it can drop your final grad by a full grade).

Decoding Symbols for Reading Assignments**CN:** Communicating nature: How we create and understand environmental messages. (Corbett)**AL101:** Active Listening 101 How to Turn Down Your Volume to Turn Up Your Communication Skills (Hardman)**SoW:** State of the world: Is sustainability still possible? (World Watch Institute)*This draft is for January; revisions after class input on January 27.*

DATE	TOPIC	TO HAVE READ BY CLASS TODAY	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
JAN 13 TUES	Start to fill out "hello sheet.". INTRO ACTIVITY: Geometric Puzzle. Debrief re: communication model. Assmt: self-introductions (begin presentations 1/15). Begin small group discussions: preferred communications.	xxxxx	xxxxx
JAN 15 THURS	Small team presentation of syllabus. Distribute "Get Out of Jail Free" cards. Introduce idea of Base Teams; distribute SKA form (due Tues, 1/20). Begin wordless self-introductions.	xxxxx	Turn in completed "hello" sheet. Self-introductions: be prepared to present.
JAN 20 TUES	Continue self-introductions. Submit SKA forms. Reasons for "communications." In-class activity: team challenge. Debrief. Prepare for Thursday.	xxxxx	Self-introductions: be prepared to present (the rest). SKA form due.
JAN 22 THURS	Small group discussions (previous groups): continue in-depth discussions from Day 2; answer each Q in detail; post for presentation on flipchart paper (or PPT, if prefer). Meet with Base Team: exchange contact info; develop SOP for how you will work informally; develop SOP for how you will work on formal group projects. Pass out "writing principles" worksheet (homework for Jan 27).	xxxxx	xxxxx
JAN 27 TUES	Geometry count activity (individual, base teams, then class). Present "results" of communications discussion; make common lists. Debrief "writing principles." Introduce "talk" assignment (talk idea due Feb 3); debrief cooperative learning	Types of speeches (HO); Methods of talk delivery (HO)	Complete "writing principles" (links with "ooooops" board items).
JAN 29 THURS	Forms of communication (verbal, non-verbal); activities. Sustainability-related issue listing.	Talk assignment (for detailed follow-up discussion)	xxxxx