

COMS342

Problem Solving in Teams and Groups

Monday & Wednesday, 12:30 – 1:45 p.m., Bailey 105

*This synchronous course is offered in person,
attendance is expected.*

Instructor and Office Hours: Cameron W. Piercy, Ph.D. cpiercy@ku.edu
Bailey 6C 785-864-5989
Student Meetings: M 10:00 to noon, W 2:00 to 3:00 pm
<https://tinyurl.com/bookwithpiercy>
***Email is the best/fastest way to contact me.*

Required Access and Materials

- Students will need to regularly (i.e., once every 48 hours or more often) access Canvas (<https://canvas.ku.edu/courses/61305>) and Microsoft Teams (<https://go.ku.edu/1OWB0f>)
- Students will need access to a sufficiently fast Internet connection to stream videos, download course materials, and video (i.e., Teams, Zoom) with peers and the instructor.
- Students will need to regularly engage on the Microsoft Teams space for this course. Students are expected to use Teams to coordinate, meet, create and share documents, and generally collaborate. The Teams space is at: <https://go.ku.edu/1OWB0f>
- **The book is free and can be accessed at:** <https://opentext.ku.edu/teams>

Course Policies

- **This course will take ~9 hours per week.** The Kansas Board of Regents sets expectations for course work-load. A full-time student (taking between 12 and 18 hours) should expect to spend between 36-48 hours in and out of the classroom. Some weeks will be busier than others.
- **Your peers' perceptions matter.** Because this class is focused on team-based activities, students will be assessed: (1) individually, (2) as a team, and (3) by their peers. Each form of assessment parallels standard business and academic practice.
- **It is not possible to practice problem solving in teams and groups without being in a team or group.** The projects assigned for this class are often not meant to be completed by an individual, they require a team. When you experience difficulty or friction in your group/team, your instructor's role is to listen and provide guidance. It is the responsibility of group members to resolve conflicts and problems in order to complete the various projects throughout the semester. Instructors only act as a consultant in these matters.
- You will regularly be given class time to meet with your group and discuss your projects; however, the demands of the assignments also require you to meet with your group outside of face-to-face class time. **This class fulfills a social science requirement—your instructor is a trained scientist. Please trust well-documented and extensive scientific evidence and get an approved COVID-19 vaccination and (when needed) booster shot.** PLEASE practice safe distancing and stay home if you do not feel well to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Please bring technology to class.** If possible, bring a phone, laptop, or tablet to class to facilitate in-class Kahoots and online interaction in your team on Teams. If you need help accessing mobile technology (i.e., a laptop) call KU-IT (785-864-8080) and ask, they have loaner technology. If you have trouble let me know.

Course Goals:

1. The purpose of this course is to overview a variety of issues in small group communication. This course will examine small groups with an emphasis on how messages, talk, symbols, and discourse contribute to effective group process. By the end of the semester you should be able to answer questions such as:
 - a. What is a small group/team?
 - b. When should individuals or groups be used to make decisions?
 - c. How do groups form and develop? What kinds of stages do they go through?
 - d. What kinds of strategies promote effective group decision making?
 - e. How do issues of power and social influence affect group life?
 - f. What leads to effective group leadership?
 - g. How can conflict within small groups be managed constructively?
2. **Learning objectives:** This course will focus on competent communication in small groups. To be a competent group communicator, you should: (a) develop an understanding of what constitutes competent communication within the small group context, and (b) be able to apply this in groups and teams. Thus, you should be able to:
 - a. Execute a complex team project including idea development, project coordination, and creation of a lasting outcome.
 - b. Develop social structures (often through messages) to manage common group issues and tensions effectively
 - c. Identify and develop skills of leading and participating within small groups
 - d. Implement appropriate conflict management techniques
 - e. Construct messages to avoid common biases in groups and teams
 - f. Generate constructive feedback for supervisors, peers, and subordinates
 - g. Facilitate effective group discussions
3. This course is also considered an upper-level course. One of the primary goals is to sharpen your written expression of important ideas and concepts and build your capacity for making **strong critical arguments backed by evidence**. Evidence-based reasoning (with SOURCES) is expected for each class assignment.
4. **We will respect one another in this course.** You will be asked to leave discussions or the course altogether if you are disrespectful to other students or the instructor.

Other Policies and Resources

- **Synchronous participation:** The Teams platform will be used regularly to facilitate class discussion. Please log in regularly to participate in the ongoing discussions. The Teams platform can be accessed at: <https://go.ku.edu/1OWB0f>
- **Deadlines:** All work is due on Canvas on Friday of each week at midnight. All written work (i.e., proposal, report, and self-reflection) must be uploaded to Canvas. **I will not accept e-mailed assignments.**
- **Bring solutions not problems:** It is inevitable that students will need extensions, will miss deadlines, and will require some help. Officially, I do not accept late work. Officially—stuff happens. So, if you need an extension, forgot to submit something, or otherwise require a modification, it is much better if you do the work and ask if I can accept it. It is

much harder for me or any instructor to say “no” to completed work than it is to say “no” to hypothetical plans. Similarly, if you need an extension, **underpromise and overdeliver**. Underpromise and overdeliver means set a reasonable deadline (if you think you can complete it by Tuesday, ask for an extension until Thursday and turn it in early). You have the ability to set the expectations for me and your other instructors—set expectations you can exceed!

- **Class format:** Content discussed in class is NOT taken *directly* from the readings. These discussions are meant to extend beyond reading content. Each student is responsible for content from the readings, class discussions, and Teams/Canvas. All class conversations will be used to create exams. **Please bring a phone, laptop, or tablet to class meetings whenever possible.**
- **Student accessibility and success.** Any student needing accommodations for the course should let me know as soon as possible. If you need an accommodation, I am here to help. Students who need assistance obtaining accommodations may contact Student Access Services at <https://access.ku.edu>, 785-864-4064, or achieve@ku.edu
- **Academic Misconduct:** Academic misconduct is a serious offense. Academic misconduct is described in *Article II, Section 6 of the University Senate Rules and Regulations*. You are responsible for knowing the standards of academic conduct. The document is available here: policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR
- **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious offense. Using the words and ideas of others is borrowing something from those individuals. It is always necessary to identify the original source of supporting information. **You must cite the source of any material, quoted or paraphrased, in both written work and oral presentations.**

Sometimes writers are uncertain about what to cite. Here are some firm guidelines:

- If you write word-for-word content which appears in another source, put quotation marks around it and cite the source (author, year, page number).
- If you borrow and summarize ideas, arguments, data, or other information from another source, cite the source even if you put the material in your own words (author, year).
- Agreeing with the material does not make it your own. If an idea you share originated from someone else, give that person credit according to a formally recognized style. Helpful websites:
 - <http://writing.ku.edu>
 - <https://owl.purdue.edu/>
- **Illness: Please pay attention to your body and do NOT attend class if you feel ill.**
 - **Continuous online access.** The global pandemic has prompted instructors to make the course always accessible via online materials (Canvas, Teams). In other words, you will NOT miss essential content if you are unable to attend face-to-face classes. If you do not feel well (i.e., with a headache, cough, fever, etc.) please do NOT attend face-to-face class. Please do what you can to keep in touch with me, so I can help you stay caught up.
- **Diversity and Inclusion.** The University of Kansas supports an inclusive learning environment in which diversity and individual differences are understood, respected, and appreciated. We believe that all students benefit from training and experiences that will help them to learn, lead, and serve in an increasingly diverse society. All members of our campus community must accept the responsibility to demonstrate civility and respect for

the dignity of others. Expressions or actions that disparage a person's or group's race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, gender identity / expression, religion, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, or disability are contrary to the mission of the University. We expect that KU students, faculty, and staff will promote an atmosphere of respect for all members of our KU community. This is an inclusive classroom. At KU, faculty, and staff are committed to the creation and maintenance of inclusive learning spaces. This classroom is a place where you will be treated with respect and dignity and where all individuals are provided equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed.

- **Responsible Communication and Media Use:** As students of communication, we expect that you will communicate and use online digital media appropriately and thoughtfully.
 - Email, phone and other communications with instructor and fellow students should be *respectful and professional*. Treat these as formal relationships.
 - Include the course number in your subject line (COMS 342).
 - Your full name should be included in the email.
 - You should have a salutation, for example, "Dear Molly" or "Dear Cameron".
 - Use correct capitalization, grammar and spelling.
 - If you are in doubt about your tone, ask yourself: *If this message appeared on a website would it reflect well on me?* **All rules regarding academic integrity extend to electronic communication.**

Synchronous Class. Attending class is essential to your success. Your semester-long project requires complex collaboration with your peers and detailed instruction from your instructor. **You must attend synchronous sessions in person to participate in quizzes, discussions, and team activities. You are expected to contribute to class discussion (and I will call on you, by name, during class discussions).** The schedule is an abstract guide, our discussions offer more concrete explanations of the content for each week.

Global Pandemic: How to be OK. We remain in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic. It has been tough. If you tell me you are having trouble, I'm not going to judge you or think less of you. In fact, I hope you will extend me the same grace. Here are some ground rules:

- You never owe me personal information about your health (mental or physical), or anything else. However, you are always welcome to talk to me about things that you might be going through.
- If I can't help you, I know about many resources on and off campus and I will do my best to direct you to resources for assistance.
- If you need extra help, please **just ask!** I will listen and will work with you.
- KU is a large campus and finding help or support can be challenging. The Communication Studies Department has a dedicated committee to focus on IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access). You can find many resources, events, reporting tools, and more on their website: <https://coms-idea.ku.edu> A large list of KU resources is available directly on this page: <https://coms-idea.ku.edu/find-support>

Grading Philosophy:

1. Grades are earned. Your grade will be a reflection of what you demonstrated you have learned, not a reflection of how hard you have worked or what you report you have learned after you have received your grade. I do not *give* you a grade, I assign your grades based on the work you complete.

2. 24/7 rule: If you do not understand why you have received the grade you have, please schedule a consultation with your instructor. Please wait **24 hours** after receiving an assignment grade to contact the instructor to discuss or appeal it. Further, you have **one week** from the date the assignment was returned in class to meet with the instructor. When bringing assignments in for discussion, please have thoughtful arguments including being able to point to specifics in the assignment and in your work. The book, lecture slides, and outside sources are all welcome in this conversation.

3. Extra credit. You can earn up to 3% extra credit in COMS342: 1) Participate in the Communication Studies Research Opportunities page on Canvas (points vary by opportunity). 2) Write a 1-page recommendation of what ought to be deleted, added, or modified in any chapter of the online textbook (up to 1% per submission). Submit all chapter revision papers to cpiercy@ku.edu

4. Incompletes are not given in COMS 342. Keep in touch with me if you need to be gone for an extended period. I am here to help you succeed and will do what I can to help you finish this course this semester.

Assignments:

Exams (24%, 240 points): This class will include three (3) exams. The exams will consist of short-response, multiple choice, fill in the blank, matching, true-false questions, and/or open-ended questions. Each exam will be administered on Canvas and due Sunday at 11:59 p, as detailed on the schedule below. No make-up exams will be allowed without written permission from the instructor.

#DoGood Project (Special Student Organization Edition)

#DoGood Step 1: What and Why Proposal (7.5%, 75 points): The first group project, due early in the semester, will focus on **proposing** how your group wants to invest time, energy, and effort in your goal of doing good. The purpose of this assignment is to articulate the organization you intend to form (what) and why this organization is a worthy cause. In line with the systems approach, this assignment will focus on your anticipated inputs and ideal outputs.

- **Deliverables:**
 - **Presentation (25 points)**
 - **One-page Proposal (50 points)**
 - **+ Peer evaluation 1 (25 points)**

#DoGood Step 2: When and How Proposal (7.5%, 75 points): Your second task as a team will be to formally articulate a timeline (when) and process (how) you will accomplish your goal. This short proposal will create a Gantt chart detailing major milestones for the group A. In addition, this document should specify who on the team is responsible for what outputs. Communication norms should be outlined (e.g., time for responses, preferred medium for communication) as well as any additional information about the team that might help structure

work (i.e., mission, clear description of roles, contact information). Finally, this document must clearly lay out the criteria for firing a team member. In line with the systems approach, this assignment will focus on throughputs.

- **Deliverables:**
 - **Written Proposal (75 points)**
 - + **Peer evaluation 2 (50 points)**

#DoGood Step 3: Feedback documentation (10%, 100 points): Successful teams listen and learn from others and from their teammates. This assignment has two foci: 1) listen and implement feedback from a trusted expert who knows about the topics you are interested in and 2) listen and deliver a helpful performance evaluation to your teammates one-on-one.

- **Deliverables:**
 - **Documentation of conversation with an outside expert (25 points)**
 - **Concept-Driven Self-reflection (individual, 50 points)**
 - + **Performance Review (deliver 25 points)**

#DoGood Step 4: Final Report (15%, 150 points): The goal of this report is to **report and summarize** your team process and return on investment. Please quantify the hours, items, dollars, etc. you contributed to help your partnering organization in your report assignment. Specific instructions will be posted on Canvas. In line with the systems perspective this assignment will focus on both throughputs and outputs.

- **Deliverables:**
 - **Presentation (50 points)**
 - **Final Written Report (100 points)**
 - + **Peer evaluation 3 (50 points)**

Discussion, Discussion Leadership, and Teams Participation (21%, 210 points)

****Some points in this category may not be allocated ****

Individual Discussion Contributions: In COMS342 we will engage in discussion in the classroom, on the Teams platform, and in Canvas forums. Discussion is designed to promote critical thinking about the ideas concepts and theories we are discussing. Please approach discussion with a willingness to share as you feel comfortable. The more you can apply the content of this course to your own work with others in teams and groups the more you will get out of this course. Each week we will also have dedicated time with a **Discussion Leadership Team** charged with generating thoughtful questions to fuel conversation.

Discussion leader teams: Discussion leader teams will receive several prompts (questions, theories, key words; provided one week prior to discussion leadership) which they must research and deliver to the class along with a thought-provoking application (e.g., a game, an activity, a thought experiment, related videos, etc.). Discussion leader teams must submit a one-page document including a brief one or two paragraph summary of key content uncovered in their research. Teams are also expected to facilitate discussions and provide explanations on the research they have done. Strong open-ended questions and guided conversations are key components to lead a successful discussion. Some of this might be documented (e.g., questions, topics, etc.) on the Discussion Summary document. This document should be uploaded to Canvas

and to the “Files” tab under the “General” channel on Teams. Each team will be responsible for one day of discussion leadership noted in the schedule below.

Quizzes: There will also be regular (weekly) 10-point quizzes via Kahoot. These quizzes can include open-ended, multiple choice, true-false, and matching question. These quizzes are designed to help you remain accountable for the readings. To facilitate continuous course engagement, two quizzes will automatically be dropped for each student—no questions asked.

Grade Points Breakdown (~1000 points)

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three Exams 24% (80 points each) • #DoGood Step 1: Where and Why Proposal 7.5% (50 for One-page Proposal, 25 for Presentation) • #DoGood Step 2: When and How Proposal 7.5% (25 points for Informational Interview; 50 points for proposal paper) • #DoGood Step 3: Give and Get Feedback 10% (25 points for evidence of feedback and feedback implementation; 25 points for Performance Review, 50 for Concept-Driven Self-Reflection) • #DoGood Step 4: Report 15% (100 points for paper, 50 for presentation) • Peer evaluations 15% (150 points: allocated by peers; 25 points Peer Evaluation Step 1, 50 points Peer Evaluation Step 2; 75 points final Peer Evaluation Step 4) • Discussion Participation 21% (210 points: across discussion boards and quizzes) <p>Research/Chapter Edits Extra Credit, up to 3% (30 points)</p> | <p><i>Final Grades:</i></p> <p>A 89.5 – 100%</p> <p>B 79.5 – 89.5%</p> <p>C 69.5 – 79.5%</p> <p>D 59.5 – 69.5%</p> <p>F < 60%</p> |
|---|--|

****Final point total may vary by section and allocated points/assignments.**

Overview:

Note: Each week of class will involve several discussions/boards, required videos, essential readings, and quizzes. Each class you are expected to engage in discussion with your classmates during the scheduled class time—participation is essential to team work.

Reminder: The book is available for free online at: <https://opentext.ku.edu/teams>

| Week | Reading | Notes and Assignment due dates | Discussion Leaders |
|----------------------------|---|--|--------------------|
| Week 1: Aug. 22 | Defining teams and groups | Lecture | |
| Aug. 24 | | Syllabus quiz Discussion – Led by Cameron Join https://jayhawkready.ku.edu/ | |
| Week 2: Aug. 29 | Cooperation & Social Comparison | Lecture | |
| Aug. 31 | | Discussion – Led by Cameron | |
| Week 3: Sept. 5 | Labor Day: No Class | | |
| Sept. 7 | The Psychology of Groups | Quiz and Discussion & Canvas Discussion Board: Potential questions exam 1 | |
| Week 4: Sept. 12 | Teams as systems | Lecture | |
| Sept. 14 | | Quiz and Discussion Exam 1 (due by Sunday at midnight) | 1 |
| Week 5: Sept. 19 | Professional Writing & Persuasive Presentations | Lecture | |
| Sept. 21 | | WORKDAY Due: Step 1: Where and Why proposal & Due: Step 1: Where and Why pitches (recorded on Teams) | PRESENT IN CLASS |
| Sept. 23 | | Business Career Fair, Kansas Union, Friday, September 23, 2022, Time 12PM-3:30PM | |

| Week | Reading | Notes and Assignment due dates | Discussion Leaders |
|----------------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| Week 6: Sept. 26 | Shared Information Bias & Inattentional Blindness | Lecture | |
| Sept. 27 | | Quiz and Discussion | 2 |
| Week 7: Oct. 3 | Groups and Meetings & Gantt Chart | Lecture | |
| Oct. 5 | | Quiz and Discussion | 3 |
| Week 8: Oct. 10 | Fall Break | | |
| Oct. 12 | Performance Evaluation | Lecture Activity: Create a Performance Evaluation Form Due: Step 2: When and How proposal & Canvas Discussion Board: Potential questions exam 2 | |
| Week 9: Oct. 17 | Power in teams | Lecture | 4 |
| Oct. 19 | | Quiz and Discussion Exam 2 (due Sunday at midnight) | |
| Oct. 20 | | Journalism and Mass Communications Career Fair, Stauffer-Flint Hall Thursday, Oct. 20, 2022, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. | |
| Week 10: Oct. 24 | Judgement and Decision Making | Lecture and quiz | |
| Oct. 26 | Cultivating a supportive group environment & Structuration Theory | Lecture and quiz | |
| Week 11: Oct. 31 | Leadership | Lecture and quiz | |

| Week | Reading | Notes and Assignment due dates | Discussion Leaders |
|----------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| Nov. 2 | | Due: Step 3: Performance Review & Summary of outsider insights | 5 |
| Week 12: Nov. 7 | Conformity and Obedience | Lecture and quiz | |
| Nov. 9 | | Due: Step 3: Concept-Driven Self Reflection Internship Fair, Kansas Union Wednesday, November 9, 2022, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. | 6 |
| Week 13: Nov. 14 | Working in Diverse Teams & Intercultural theory of Plane Crashes | Lecture and quiz | |
| Nov. 16 | No Class: Work Day/NCA | | WORKDAY, online |
| Week 14: Nov. 21 | Teaming with Machines | Lecture and quiz | |
| Nov. 23 | No Class: Thanksgiving Break | | |
| Week 15: Nov. 28 | Conflict and Negotiation | Lecture and quiz | |
| Nov. 30 | Work Day | Canvas Discussion Board: Potential questions exam 3 | WORKDAY, online |
| Week 16: Dec. 5 | | Due: Step 4: Report & Due: Step 4: Final Presentations (in class) | PRESENT IN CLASS |
| Dec. 7 | Work Day | | WORKDAY, online |
| Finals Week | | Exam 3 (due Friday, Dec. 16 th at 1:00 pm) | |