

# COM 350 Organizational Communication

Fall 2019

Class Meets: MWF 9:00-9:50 a.m.

Classroom: Reese Phifer 226

email: csparsons@ua.edu

*email is the best way to reach me.*

Instructor: C. Parsons

Office Hours: WF 11-12 or by appt

Phone: 205-348-5995

Office: Reese Phifer 203

## Course Description

Theoretical approach to the study of human communication in organizations. Emphasizes organizational communication theories and communication networks as well as dyadic, small-group, and public communication. This class is highly interactive. Students are required to conduct an organizational field study.

Your keys to success in this course: diligence, drive, and determination!

## Required Reading:

Eisenberg, E. M., Trethewey, A., LeGreco, M., & Goodall, H. L. (2017). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Com 350 Course Packet. Print the packet and bring it with you to class each day.

Scholarly reading will be done by each student for the organizational field study.

## Course Objectives

In this course, students will learn to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of organizational communication theories and concepts.
- Identify and articulate the connections between theory and practice of organizational communication.
- Demonstrate how critical thinking and communication can be used to solve problems.
- Create, execute, and present a field study of organizational communication and culture.
- Prepare and present well organized and reasoned oral and written communication.
- Adapt communication messages to a diverse variety of audiences.
- Engage in self-reflection and feedback, through the editing and revision of written work.
- Demonstrate proficiency in academic writing, APA Style, and the citation of academic journals.

## Course Requirements:

**Reading Quizzes** (100 points, or 10%) - Occasional reading quizzes are given in class on unannounced dates. Reading quizzes can be oral or written and typically occur at the beginning of class.

**Organizational Experiences Talk** (100 points, or 10%) – 5-minute talk in which you print and bring a one-page drawing (or visual aid) that describes your experiences in a particular organization (e.g., student club, part-time job) that you were involved with for more than one year. Tell stories, provide illustrative metaphors, and give specific examples about “how things worked” there. You’ll critique both your peer’s and your own talk.

**Organizational Critique Paper** (500 points, or 50%) - You will conduct a field study of an organization of your choosing through the lens of a COM theory, which culminates in a 12-15 page paper with 5+ academic source citations. First, you will negotiate a theory and an organization to work with this semester. Then, you will locate journal articles about your theory and its application. Next, you will conduct a thorough field study of your organization so that you can identify and articulate specific ways that it could improve its

communication. Finally, you will write a draft of a paper to be edited, before then writing a full paper to be presented to the class and to the organization itself. *Details in course packet.*

**Steps in the Project:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Topic Description (pass/fail, required)   | 5. Self-Reflection Paper (pass/fail, required) |
| 2. Source List (50 points or 5%)             | 6. Oral Presentation (50 points or 5%)         |
| 3. Fieldnotes (100 points or 10%)            | 7. Full Paper (250 points or 25%)              |
| 4. Drafts of the Paper (pass/fail, required) | 8. Recommendations Handout (50 pts or 5%)      |

**Organizational Culture Paper** (100 points, or 10%) – A 6-8 page paper, in which you describe the culture of the profession you aspire to enter after you graduate. You must interview someone who currently works in this industry in order to write this paper (see sample interview questions in course packet). You must also locate a job advertisement that describes the job you may one day like to have. Topics that must be covered in the paper: 1) structure of the job and 2) norms and expectations of the profession. *See details in course packet.*

**Attendance and Participation** (200 points, or 20%) - Daily oral and/or written activities will be graded on quality of contribution, promptness, and evidence of preparation. Participation in a rough draft editing process is required. Peer exchanges of writing feedback are required on designated dates, as indicated in the schedule. You will participate in activities such as NASA Lost on the Moon and negotiating conflict scenarios.

## Weekly Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1	Course introduction and overview <b>Self-Introductions and Assign Syllabus Quiz</b>	Chapter 1
Week 2	Organizational Communication: Definitions <b>Due in Class:</b> Introduce Your Peer, 2-minutes: hometown, major, career goals, primary role model/influencer, turning point(s) during college <b>Due on BB:</b> Syllabus quiz answers	Chapters 2
Week 3	Systems of Organizing: Systems Theory <b>Assign Organizational Experiences Talk</b>	Chapters 3 and 4
Week 4	Organizational Culture Metaphors for the Organizational Experience Organizational Socialization and Assimilation Norms and Conformity: Overcoming Groupthink <b>Due in Class:</b> Organizational Experiences Talks	Chapter 5
Week 5	Studying Organizations Organizational Ethnography and the Field Study Method <b>Assign Organizational Critique Paper</b>	Appendix: How to Conduct a Field Study
Week 6	Stakeholder Communication and Workplace Democracy Critical Approaches to Organizational Communication <b>Due in Class:</b> Name of the Organization You Intend to Critique	Chapter 6
Week 7	APA Style and Bibliography Workshop <b>Due on BB:</b> Source List	
Week 8	Team Communication and Conflict <b>Activity:</b> Conflict and negotiation scenarios Group Decision-Making	Chapter 8

	<b>Activity:</b> NASA Lost on the Moon	
Week 9	Communicating Leadership	Chapter 9
Week 10	Organizational Field Study Workshop <b>Due on BB:</b> Field Study notes and observations	
Week 11	Strategic Communication The Seven S Model of McKinsey	Chapter 10
Week 12	Rough Draft Critiques <b>Due in class (printed):</b> Draft of Organizational Critique <b>Due via email:</b> Feedback on Peer's Draft (emailed to peer)	Academic Writing Guide Paper scoring rubric
Week 13	Writing Consultations <b>Due on BB:</b> Self-Reflection Paper	
Week 14	Organizational Identity and Organizational Culture <b>Assign Organizational Culture Paper</b>	Chapter 5 (cont'd) and Chapter 7
Week 15	Oral Presentations	
Week 16	Bringing it all together: Course overview <b>Due on BB:</b> Full Organizational Critique Paper	Learning outcomes
Exam Wk	<b>Due on BB:</b> Organizational Culture Paper	

Syllabus Ends Here. Course Packet begins on next page.

# COM 350 Organizational Communication

## *Course Packet*

### Table of Contents

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
Syllabus Quiz	4
Organizational Critique: Assignment Description	5
Organizational Critique: Evaluation Criteria	6
Organizational Culture Paper	7
Academic Writing Guidelines	8
Conflict and Negotiation scenarios	9
NASA Lost on the Moon activity	10

### Syllabus Quiz

1. Describe the content and length of the Organizational Critique.
2. How many academic journal article citations are required in the Organizational Critique?
3. Describe the content and length of the Self-Reflection Paper.
4. Describe the content and length of the Organizational Culture Paper.

# Organizational Critique

You will conduct a field study of an organization through the lens of a COM theory, and write an organizational critique that summarizes your conclusions and recommendations. Carefully review the instructions below, along with guidelines in the course packet and book, to prepare your paper.

## Steps in the Writing Process:

1. **Topic Description** - Two paragraphs that describe how you'll conduct your field study.
2. **Source List w/ Annotations** - Locate 5+ scholarly articles and sources that illuminate the COM theory you're using to analyze and assess your organization. Summarize and cite these 5+ scholarly sources in APA style. Include a brief summary of each article, describing what the authors *did* and what they *found* in the study, and how the findings of this past research illuminate your current field study.
3. **Fieldnotes** – You must personally attend meetings and/or interact face-to-face with an organization for 8+ hours. Provide a *Word* document of 10+ s.s. pages that include reflections about such human interaction as meeting observations and personal interviews with members. You may also reflect on such organizational artifacts (printed or online) as: annual reports, promotional materials, media content, transcripts of speeches by or interviews with organizational members or leaders.
4. **Draft of the Paper** - Print your draft and bring it to class for editing and feedback. You'll also edit a classmate's draft via email.
5. **Self-Reflection** - Write 1-3 pages assessing your writing so far this semester. How is your choice of theory shaping your field study? What've been the hardest obstacles to overcome? What are 2 things about your writing that have improved and 2 things that still need work?
6. **Full Paper** – 12-15 double spaced pages. 5+ academic source citations. *See grading rubric.*
7. **Oral Presentation** - Present your findings in a 5-7 min speech during class. One-page speaking outline and bibliography required at the beginning of your speech day. Provide a printed page that summarizes your 3+ recommendations and how you arrived at those conclusions.

**Editing Process** – Rough drafts of your paper are required a couple of weeks before the final draft is due. You'll receive a pass/fail grade for participating in a rough draft editing process and the quality of your writing will be assessed. Your ability to respond to evaluative feedback will be assessed.

**Pass:** Draft contains 3 main sections, 5+ scholarly citations, and 3+ thoughtful recommendations.

**Fail:** Absence of any of the above requirements.

**Recommendations** - Articulate at least three specific ways in which your org could improve its communication, based on the tenets of your theory and on past research findings. Include several entries from your fieldnotes to describe how you arrived at your conclusions and recommendations.

- a. Based on your personal observations (e.g., interviews, meetings, parking lot), describe how the org's vision and mission could be more clearly communicated by members and leaders.
- b. How could the artifacts of the org (e.g., annual reports, announcements, newsletters, speeches, web presence) communicate the org's vision and mission even more clearly?

# Organizational Critique

## *Evaluation Criteria*

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Work</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<b>Topic focus</b>	Topic is narrowed to fit assignment. Clear thesis.	Topic is focused but lacks clear direction. Thesis is present.	Topic is too broad for the scope of this assignment.	Topic is not clearly defined. Need a thesis statement.
<b>Depth of discussion</b>	In-depth discussn and elaboration in all sections.	In-depth discussion and elaboration in most sections.	Pertinent content omitted. Does not explain quotes.	Cursory discussion in most sections. Brief and unspecific.
<b>Cohesiveness</b>	Ties together info from all sources. Paper flows and is easy to follow.	For the most part, ties together info from sources. Minor disjointedness.	Ties together info from some sources. Disjointed sections.	Does not tie together info. Paper does not flow and is disjointed.
<b>Knowledge of Theory</b>	Clearly explains a theoretical foundation.	Explains a theoretical foundation.	Explains little theoretical foundation.	Unclear theoretical foundation.
<b>Application of theory</b>	Clearly explains the application of a theory in past research.	Explains the application of a theory in past research.	Explains little application of a theory in past research.	Does not explain the application of a theory in past research.
<b>Method</b>	Clearly describes how field study was conducted.	Describes how field study was conducted.	Unclear descriptn of how field study was conducted.	Does not describe how field study was conducted.
<b>Recommendations</b>	Clearly describes 3+ ways org can improve its comm.	Describes 3+ ways the org can improve its comm.	Describes 2-3 ways the org can improve its comm.	Describes 0-1 ways the org can improve its comm.
<b>Spelling and grammar</b>	No spelling or grammar mistakes.	Minimal spelling or grammar mistakes.	Many spelling and grammar mistakes.	Unacceptable spelling, grammar.
<b>Sources</b>	5+ excellent scholarly sources.	5+ good scholarly sources.	3-4 scholarly sources.	0-2 scholarly sources.
<b>Citations</b>	Cites all sources. APA citation style clear & consistent.	Cites most sources. APA style is used both in text & bib.	Cites some sources. Style is inconsistent.	Little citation of sources. No consistent style.

# Organizational Culture Paper

A 6-8 page paper that describes the culture of the working profession that you aspire to enter after graduation. You must interview someone who currently works in this industry in order to write this paper (see sample interview questions below). You must also conduct your research for this paper by locating a job advertisement that accurately describes an entry-level position within this industry.

First, describe the **structure** of the job. Summarize the job advertisement and the job description. What are the job duties? What is the title of an entry-level position in this industry? What is a title you might aspire to after you have been in this profession for a while? What is the title of the supervisor to whom you might report? What are their duties? What is the organizational flow chart (leadership hierarchy) in this job? How large would your co-worker team be? What is a typical starting salary for this job? What are the benefits? What are the work hours?

Next, describe the **norms and expectations** of this professional culture. For example, what are the work hours? Is the atmosphere restrained or easy-going? Is the pace steady or erratic? What are the expectations for vacation time? What are the expectations for attire? What kind of office space might you be working in?

Conclude your paper by describing how prepared you feel at this point to enter this profession. Describe specific actions you could take (e.g., polishing up your resume, developing a portfolio of work samples) in order to be competitive on the job market.

Examples of communication professions: human resources manager, sales representative, news reporter, event planner, youth minister, content creator, publishing representative, advocate or lobbyist, hospital administrator, sports marketer, campaign manager, theater teacher, or fitness coach and trainer.

This paper will be graded based on clarity and specificity of answers to the questions listed in the description of the assignment. You will also be graded on the quality and depth of evidence and explanation from the interview you conducted.

# Conflict and Negotiation Scenarios

Instructions: With your group, read the conflict scenarios below and develop some solutions that could produce positive results. Brainstorm each possible solution separately, along with its pros and cons, and informally report to the class.

**A fellow group member, Lance,** has not been pulling his weight on the group project. Lance claims he is contributing, but that he is swamped with other class work, his job, and the aftermath of a recent breakup. Some group members are so upset that they feel they should take their complaints about Lance to the professor. You are good friends with Lance and have confidence that he can complete the work at hand, but feel that he is catastrophizing his problems a bit. You brought up these issues with Lance over dinner last night, but he was defensive. He claimed that the group was not being sympathetic and was ganging up on him.

What is the best course(s) of action to take in this case? Should you convince the group members that there is an alternative to going to the professor for help? What do you suggest to improve the situation?

**Your group is** composed of five people. Two of them have stated that they feel that one member, Arnold, is dominating the group process and, more importantly, the decision making. Arnold is allegedly not listening to anyone else's ideas and "mowing down" other members of the group who are trying to contribute something to the project. You know that the two group members are right and that they are following ethical group process by bringing up the issue to the group, rather than running to the professor for help. You feel, however, that you might jeopardize your own reputation and your grade by supporting them, especially since Arnold was elected as a group leader early in the planning stages of the group. One of the members of the group appears to be neutral, as far as you can tell.

What are your possibilities? What is the best course(s) of action to take in this case?



## NASA “Lost on the Moon” exercise Individual Worksheet

Instructions:

Your spaceship has crash-landed on the lighted surface of the moon. You were scheduled to rendezvous with a mother ship 200 miles away, also on the lighted side of the moon. The rough landing has ruined your ship and destroyed all the equipment on board, except for the 12 items listed below.

Your crew’s survival depends on reaching the mother ship, so you must choose the most critical items available for the 200-mile trip. Your task is to rank the 12 items according to their importance in allowing your crew to survive the 200-mile journey to the mother ship. In the column titled “your rank,” place the number 1 by the most important item, and so on through number 12, the least important.

	<u>Your rank</u>	<u>NASA rank</u>	<u>Difference</u>
box of matches	_____	_____	_____
food concentrate	_____	_____	_____
50 feet of nylon rope	_____	_____	_____
parachute silk	_____	_____	_____
two .45 caliber pistols	_____	_____	_____
solar-powered portable heating unit	_____	_____	_____
two 100 pound tanks of oxygen	_____	_____	_____
map of the moon’s constellation	_____	_____	_____
self-inflating life raft	_____	_____	_____
magnetic compass	_____	_____	_____
5 gallons of water	_____	_____	_____
solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter	_____	_____	_____
TOTAL DIFFERENCE:			_____

## NASA “Lost on the Moon” exercise Group Worksheet

**Instructions:** Your task is to reach a consensus ranking of the 12 items needed to survive the journey to the mother ship 200 miles away. This means that the ranking for each of the 12 items must be agreed upon by each member of the group before it becomes a part of the group’s decision. Here are some guides to use in reaching consensus:

1. Don’t argue stubbornly for your own point of view just because it is yours. Listen to other members of the group and be willing to change your views on the basis of reason and logic.
2. On the other hand, don’t change your mind simply to avoid disagreement. Seek out differences of opinion and try to get every member involved in the decision-making process. The more information you have, the better chance you have of making a sound decision.
3. Avoid such techniques as majority vote, averaging, flipping coins, and bargaining.

	<u>Group rank</u>	<u>NASA rank</u>	<u>Difference</u>
box of matches	_____	___(12)___	_____
food concentrate	_____	___(4)___	_____
50 feet of nylon rope	_____	___(6)___	_____
parachute silk	_____	___(7)___	_____
two .45 caliber pistols	_____	___(9)___	_____
solar-powered portable heating unit	_____	___(10)___	_____
two 100 pound tanks of oxygen	_____	___(1)___	_____
map of the moon’s constellation	_____	___(3)___	_____
self-inflating life raft	_____	___(8)___	_____
magnetic compass	_____	___(11)___	_____
5 gallons of water	_____	___(2)___	_____
solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter	_____	___(5)___	_____
<b>TOTAL DIFFERENCE:</b>			_____

For the original individual task (instructions and answer key), see:

Hall, J. & Watson, W. H. (1970). The effects of a normative intervention on group decision-making performance. *Human Relations*, 23, 299–317.