

**Psychology 381**  
**Group Dynamics**  
**Winter 2020**

**Instructor:** Dr. Christine Smith  
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Office Hours: T/TH 11:30-12:30, or by appointment

▪ **Required Books:**

Maalouf, A. (2003). *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. Penguin Books.  
Layton, D. (1998). *Seductive Poison: A Jonestown Survivor's Story of Life and Death in the People's Temple*. Doubleday.

Additional Readings listed in the syllabus made available via BlackBoard links.

I provide all of the PowerPoint Slides that I use during lecture to students via BlackBoard links.

**This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at**  
<http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>

**Course Description and Goals:** This course examines human behavior in groups. Researchers in many different social sciences have come to understand group behavior and have developed many useful theoretical perspectives that can be applied to groups. This course reviews that work, with particular emphasis on these goals:

- Knowledge of how to do research that will lead to improvement of groups
- Knowledge of ways group dynamics can be applied to improve groups
- Understanding processes that occur in groups (social influence, conformity, etc.)
- Understanding how groups can be used to help people (therapeutic groups)
- Knowledge of major research studies of group processes
- Firm grasp of theories that explain group processes

Beyond the content of the course, I hope that you use this course to develop further your scholarly skills, including gains in critical thinking, ethical thought, writing and communication, information search and retrieval, technological skills, scientific skills, and study skills. You will also develop enhanced insight into your own group behavior, and these insights may help you better understand yourself and your relations with others. This is NOT, however, a course on “group skills” or “encountering others in groups.”

This is NOT a self-development course: our focus is on studying groups and group processes, rather than developing interpersonal skills.

**Activities and Assignments:** This class requires active participation. This course is theory/research focused rather than skills-focused, but I do hope that you will acquire insight into your own social tendencies as a result of participating in this class, and I expect that the knowledge you gain about yourself should be both positive and useful. As the instructor, I will try to help you learn the course material by giving lectures, assigning activities that ask you to experience group processes first hand, by answering your questions, and providing you with feedback about your progress in the course. Please remember that my primary goal is to assist you as you learn about groups and their dynamics. As a student, you are responsible, at minimum, for studying the text, retaining material presented in the lecture, taking the required examinations, and participating actively by completing the activities and assignments. Your task of learning group dynamics will be easier if you take an **ACTIVE**, rather than passive approach to the course. In some content-focused courses absorbing the material and repeating it back on exams is all that is required for a good grade. Such is not the case with this class, for I am more interested in your ability to conceptualize theoretical issues, apply material in new contexts, and energetically examine groups and their dynamics.

Your grade in the course will be determined by performance on an assortment of written assignments, classroom activities, and exams.

- Exams: We will have two exams during the course of the semester. Naturally, items on the tests will cover all course material no matter what its source (e.g., lecture, text, readings, or video). The midterm and final exam will be comprised of multiple choice items.
- Small 2-3 page paper exploring an idea related to one of the films we view in class. These topics will be provided later this week. You may submit your paper any time during the semester, however, there is a deadline (in the syllabus) indicating the final day small papers may be submitted.
- Thoughtful Response Papers: Several times during the semester I will ask that students write a response to a prompt related to the day's discussion/lecture. These prompts might ask that you apply course material to a film clip, a group activity, or to one of our assigned readings. As long as your response is thoughtful and demonstrates that you have kept up with your reading, you will be given full credit for it. If you are absent on the day that a Thoughtful Response Paper is assigned you **WILL NOT** be given the opportunity to make it up. It is for this reason, amongst others, that regular class attendance is an important determinant of your final grade in this class.

**Grading:**

Your final grade will be based upon two exams (100 points each), the small paper (50 points) and the Thoughtful Response Papers (50 points). Your lowest thoughtful response paper will be dropped. There will be **NO** extra credit in the class.

**Grade Distribution:**

A	100-94%	A-	93.99-90%	B+	89.99-87%
B	86.99-84%	B-	83.99-80%	C+	79.99-77%
C	76.99-74%	C-	73.99-70%	D+	69.99-67%
D	66.99-60%				
F	59% and lower				

**In order to be caught up with your reading, you should aim to have read all assignments by the end of the week in which they are assigned. All readings (with the exception of the two required texts) are posted to BB and labeled by week.**

**Course Topics and Outline****Week 1:  
January 7-9**

**Defining Groups:** Exploring our social nature. What are groups and what are their key features?

**Read:** Week 1 Readings posted to BB

**Week 2:  
January 14-16**

**The Need to Belong:** Do humans prefer inclusion to exclusion? How do group experiences shape individuals' sense of self?

**Read:** Week 2 Readings posted to BB

**Week 3:  
January 21-23**

**The Need to Belong:** Continued

**Read:** Section 1 (pg. 1-43) In the Name of Identity  
Week 3 Readings posted to BB

**Week 4:**  
**January 28-30**

**Social Categorization:** What is in-group favoritism and why does it occur? What is the minimal intergroup effect and why does it occur? Why might people identify with radical groups?

**Read:** Week 4 Readings posted to BB

**Week 5:**  
**February 4-6**

**Social Categorization:** Continued

**Read:**

Section 3 & 4 (pg. 87-164) In the Name of Identity

**Week 6:**  
**February 11-13**

**Social Categorization**

**Watch 12 Angry Men**

**Read:** Week 6 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 7:**  
**February 18-20**

**Social Influence:** When will people conform to a group's standard? When will they remain independent? Do nonconformists ever succeed in influencing the rest of the group?

**Read:** Week 7 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 8:**  
**February 24-27**

**Social Influence & Group Decision Making**

**Read:** Layton's Seductive Poison (pg. 1-305)

**Exam on Thursday**

**Week 9:**

**Spring Break .**

**Week 10:**  
**March 10-12**

**Group Decision Making and Extreme Groups:** Why do some highly cohesive groups make disastrous decisions? Why do groups sometimes make riskier decisions than individuals?

**Read:** Week 9 Readings posted to BB. **Watch Jonestown Video**

**Week 11:**  
**March 17-19**

**Extreme Groups Continued**

**Read:** Week 11 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 12:**  
**March 24-26**

**Extreme Groups Continued**

**Read:** Week 12 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 13:**  
**March 31-April 2    Reading “Catch up”**

**Week 14:**  
**April 7-9**                    **Group Performance and Productivity:** Do people perform tasks more effectively in groups or when they are alone? Who do people sometimes expend so little effort in groups? When does a group outperform and individual?  
**Read:** Week 14 Readings posted to BB.  
**April 7<sup>th</sup>-Last Day to turn in small paper. 5:00 pm deadline.**

**Week 15:**  
**April 14-16**                    **Group Performance and Productivity (continued):**  
**Read:** Week 15 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 16:**                    **Final Exam**  
8:30 Class                    April 23 @ 8:00 AM  
10:00 Class                    April 23 @ 10:00 AM