

**Psychology 381  
Group Dynamics  
Winter 2019**

**Instructor:** Dr. Christine Smith  
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331-2424  
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Office Hours: T/TH 1:00-2:15, 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 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 and short essay questions.
- Theory Application project. Each student will submit four examples of theoretical applications applied to real world events. These can be submitted one by one at any point during the semester with a final completion date of April 22 @ 5:00 for the final application.
- Group Applications Activities (grade based upon participation).

**Grading:**

Your final grade will be based upon two exams (100 points each), the theory application project (100 points) and the Group Application Activities (30 points). 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:**

**Jan 8-10**

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

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

**Week 2:**

**Jan 15-17**

**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:**

**Jan 22-25**

**The Need to Belong:** Continued

**Read:** Section 1 (pg. 1-43) In the Name of Identity

Week 3 Readings posted to BB

**Week 4:**

**Jan 29-31**

**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:**

**Feb 5-7**

**Social Categorization:** Continued

**Read:**

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

**NO CLASS ON 2/7/2019-I WILL BE ATTENDING A CONFERENCE.**

**Week 6:**

**Feb 12-14**

**Social Categorization**

**Watch 12 Angry Men**

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

**Week 7:  
Feb 19-21**

**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:  
Feb 26-28**

**Social Influence & Group Decision Making**  
**Read:** Layton's Seductive Poison (pg. 1-305)  
**Exam on Thursday**

**Week 9**

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 10:  
March 12-14**

**Group Decision Making (Continued)**  
**Read:** Week 8 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 11:  
March 19-21**

**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.

**Week 12:  
March 26-28**

**Extreme Groups Continued**  
**Read:** Week 11 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 13:  
April 2-4**

**Extreme Groups Continued**  
**Read:** Week 12 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 14:  
April 9-11**

**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 an individual?  
**Read:** Week 14 Readings posted to BB.

**Week 15:  
April 16-18**

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

**Week 16:**

**Final Theory Application Project due**  
**Monday April 22<sup>nd</sup> @ 5:00 PM**

**Final Exam**

**Wednesday April 24<sup>th</sup> @ 12:00**