

# COMM 528: Communication in the Nonprofit Sector

## Spring 2021 Online

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### DR. JENNIFER MIZE SMITH

Office: 102 Fine Arts Center  
E-Mail: [jennifer.mize.smith@wku.edu](mailto:jennifer.mize.smith@wku.edu)

Phone: 270-745-3296 (Comm Dept)  
Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

## Course Description

This graduate seminar will provide students with an overview of organizational communication issues and the ways in which they are uniquely situated in and applied to nonprofit organizations and philanthropy. Readings and discussions will explore communication processes at individual and organizational levels, as well as the blurred boundaries between internal and external communication. Our discussions will be organized around various nonprofit stakeholders and representative issues that are salient to each group.

You will find that not all readings are written from a communicative perspective. However, throughout the course, we will foreground communication, question the role of discourse, and explore the theoretical and pragmatic implications a communicative lens brings to bear on nonprofit and philanthropic issues.

The theme of the semester is *Turning Theory into Practice*. To ensure we not only learn but apply course concepts, we will analyze communication challenges in empirical nonprofit case studies, interact with nonprofit organizational representatives, and evaluate and critique messages and strategies of current nonprofit organizations.

## Course Objectives

- To introduce a range of topics related to the study and practice of organizational communication in nonprofit organizations and the philanthropic sector.
- To broaden the thinking of organizational communication research and its application to nuanced contexts.
- To understand and analyze nonprofit communication processes that are both similar and different to those in other kinds of organizations.
- To interact with local nonprofit organizations and their representatives.
- To apply communication theories and concepts to a nonprofit context.
- To enhance research, analysis, writing, and presentation skills.

## M.A. in Organizational Communication Objectives

- Research mastery
- Writing mastery
- Explanation of theories and concepts
- Identify distinct communication practices of culturally diverse groups
- Demonstrate ability to apply communication concepts in organizational contexts

## Certificate in Communicating in Organizations Objectives

- Identify and analyze communication challenges in organizational life.
- Apply communication theories and principles to construct practical recommendations that address organizational challenges.
- Evaluate and/or develop messages and strategies that affect organizational outcomes.

## Course Materials

### Required

Weekly article readings posted on Blackboard.

Mize Smith, J., & Kramer, M. W. (Eds.). (2015). *Case studies of nonprofit organizations and volunteers*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

### Optional

If you find you need some background reading on the structure, functions, processes, and issues of nonprofit organizations and/or the philanthropic sector, the following books will provide a good foundation and may be placed on reserve in the library upon request.

Herman, R.D., & Associates. (1994). *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Salamon, L.M. (Ed.) (2002). *The state of nonprofit America*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Smith, Bucklin, & Associates. (2000). *The complete guide to nonprofit management* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

## Required Skills for Online Course

- Ability to participate in Zoom class meetings via audio AND video
- Ability to navigate Blackboard, including reading and posting messages to the discussion boards
- Ability to access, open, and view videos and PowerPoint slides
- Ability to navigate the Web (use a browser) and handle multiple open windows
- Ability to browse Web pages
- Ability to open and navigate PDF files using Adobe Acrobat
- Knowledge of how to create, send, open, close, and save files and attachments with Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint
- Basic word processing skills

## Technical Assistance

If you are experiencing technical difficulties with Blackboard, call WKU's IT Help Desk (270-745-7000) IMMEDIATELY. You may also visit the online [IT Help Desk](#). If the issue is not resolved and may affect your ability to complete an assignment, email me immediately to explain your situation.

## Teaching Philosophy

I believe that a teacher's responsibility is not to prepare the path for the child, but to prepare the child for the path. Today's students will embark on numerous life and career paths, none of which can be mapped or predicted in a world where perhaps the only constant is change. Success that was once ensured by the mastery of a set body of knowledge now rests upon one's ability to continuously learn and relearn the skills required for increasingly diverse, changing, and challenging environments. As such, my goal as a teacher is not merely to impart content knowledge, but to construct an engaging learning environment in which students can enhance their critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and presentational skills.

## Professor Communication

The best way to contact me is via email (rather than phone). Be sure to include the two dots in my email address – [jennifer.mize.smith@wku.edu](mailto:jennifer.mize.smith@wku.edu). I will make every effort to respond to your email in a timely (not necessarily immediate) manner. However, email may not be checked after 5 pm each day, so plan accordingly.

# Policies and Expectations

## Attendance

You are expected to attend every class (in this case, via Zoom) for the entire length of time scheduled. You are also expected to be on time for each class meeting. If you have a problem, you should contact me before class begins. If you miss two or more classes, you will be asked to withdraw from the course.

## Arriving Late/Leaving Early

You are expected to be on time for class, even though meetings are held virtually. Attendance is defined as being present no later than 5 minutes after the start of class and includes being present until the end of the class session. When virtual, “being present” means with video on the majority of the time, with only short, occasional breaks of turning it off if needed. Tardiness will be considered an absence if you are not present when the attendance is taken—no exceptions. Leaving early will also be considered an absence if you have not gained prior approval. When virtual, “leaving early” includes turning off your video for an extended period of time before the end of class.

## Written Assignment Guidelines

You are expected to have developed the writing skills that are appropriate to graduate level study. At a minimum, this includes grammatically correct sentences, well-developed paragraphs, and organized, coherent patterns of thought. Papers must be typewritten in a standard Microsoft Word format with 12 point font, double-spacing, and 1” margins. All written work must adhere to the APA (7<sup>th</sup> edition) Publication Manual. For help with APA style, see online sources such as <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>. Errors in APA, as well as spelling and grammar, will result in point deductions. Papers must also conform to the page length indicated. See APA manual for guidelines on organization and the use of various levels of headings.

All assignments must be submitted through Blackboard using the Assignments page and Safe Assign when instructed. *Do not send your assignments to my email address.* For assistance with how to turn in an assignment in Blackboard, view the tutorial at [http://www.wku.edu/infotech/atech/videotutorials/assignment\\_student.htm](http://www.wku.edu/infotech/atech/videotutorials/assignment_student.htm). Directions for how to name each assignment when saving and submitting will be provided with assignment instructions.

## Assignment Deadlines

Deadlines are imposed to allow a reasonable amount of time to complete assignments and to give and receive feedback in a timely manner. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments must be submitted by the due date provided, and all times are Central Standard Time. Late work MAY be accepted at my discretion but only when arrangements are made in advance. IF accepted, late papers will be penalized one letter grade per weekday the assignment is late. Late work WILL NOT be accepted more than 3 days after the original due date.

*Medical Exception:* If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or any other serious illness that prevents you from attending class or meeting a deadline, you should provide a doctor’s note. We will then work together to establish new assignment deadlines to avoid late work penalties. Please contact me as soon as possible to arrange any accommodations needed due to medical emergencies.

*Campus Closure:* In the event that the University cancels classes, such as for severe weather, we will continue to meet via Zoom. Deadlines will not be changed unless otherwise notified.

## Class Environment

To ensure we create an atmosphere conducive to student participation, you are expected to show the utmost respect for all class members. This includes paying attention to others, participating in group activities, and avoiding disruptive behaviors. Establishing a cooperative climate also means supporting your peers, being open to new ways of thinking, and being considerate of others when discussing different ideas. Therefore, it is important that we follow certain ground rules when interacting within the context of this course. These rules of civility include but are not limited to:

1. Displaying respect for all members of the classroom community, both your instructor and fellow students.
2. Being open to understanding different perspectives and experiences.
3. Avoiding racist, sexist, homophobic, or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom community.
4. Re-thinking and/or re-reading your comments and questions to avoid hasty, ill-conceived responses.

## **Academic Integrity**

Western Kentucky University maintains a “zero tolerance” policy on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. As a student at Western Kentucky University, you are expected to demonstrate academic integrity, as outlined in the University Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities (WKU Catalog, 260) in all coursework. Violations of this code of conduct include but are not limited to cheating (by giving or receiving unauthorized information before or during an exam or assignment), dishonesty (including misrepresentation and/or lying), and plagiarism.

Plagiarism consists of presenting work that is not your own without proper acknowledgment of its origin--including quoting or paraphrasing material (orally or written) and not crediting the original author through a citation, copying from a book, pasting text from web pages, or using an Internet source to obtain a full paper or part of a paper.

In short, **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE** for telling your audience or reader whether you are:

1. directly quoting from a source
2. paraphrasing closely from a source, which means using significant portions of another source’s sentences or language
3. using the ideas advanced by a different source

In addition to plagiarism, other forms of academic dishonesty include falsified medical excuses, presenting another student’s work as your own, using the same work for assignments in different classes, or sharing exam information.

### *Plagiarism Detection*

**Student work will be checked using Safe Assign, the plagiarism detection software available on Blackboard.**

In this course we will be using an electronic plagiarism detection tool, SafeAssign (through Blackboard), to confirm that you have used sources accurately in your papers. Students agree that by taking this course, all assignments are subject to submission for textual similarity review to SafeAssign.

Assignments submitted to SafeAssign will be included as source documents in SafeAssign’s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents.

## **Penalty for Academic Dishonesty**

Western Kentucky University and the Department of Communication are committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on an exam, or purchasing papers, speeches, or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade on the assignment and in the course, and will be reported for disciplinary action. Falsified medical excuses and presenting another student’s work as your own fall within the guidelines of this academic integrity policy.

Other sanctions include but are not limited to assigning a failing grade for the course without possibility of withdrawal, as well as presenting the case to the Office of the Dean of Student Life for disciplinary sanctions (WKU Catalog, 27).

As you can see, these are extreme measures for academic offenses that we believe are serious. If you have any questions, please contact me well in advance of the due date for your assignment.

# Course Assignments/Requirements

The following is a general description of the course assignments. Specific instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

## **Class Participation **100 pts.****

*Purpose: To encourage students to prepare for and engage in class discussions of the material*

**This is a graduate course, and you are expected to participate.**

A collaborative learning environment will be both more interesting and beneficial for everyone. This course is designed in a seminar format such that students should be fully engaged in the teaching and learning process (even when virtual). Therefore, you are expected to participate fully in the course. This includes reading assigned materials before class and being prepared to summarize, discuss, question, debate and critique course readings. *You may find the reading list in this course to be challenging, so plan your time accordingly.*

Meaningful contributions to in-class discussions will demonstrate focused attention, listening and taking notes, thoughtful and appropriate comments, respect and support for other class members, understanding and critical thinking of readings, as well as an ability to synthesize and apply material.

Participation also includes being prepared for class by bringing any assigned materials, participating in class activities, and interacting with guest speakers.

Participation will be evaluated using letter grades that translate into the following points:  
A= 95 pts, B= 85 pts, C= 75 pts, D or F= 0 pts.

You will receive mid-semester feedback regarding your class participation. If you would like more frequent feedback concerning your participation, don't hesitate to ask.

## **Discussion Questions **35 pts.****

*Purpose: To encourage students to actively read, critique, and reflect on course material*

Active reading means you are intentional about learning—not just reading to say you did it, but reading with a purpose to understand, critique, and reflect on the material. To facilitate that kind of thoughtful process, you will post questions related to each article. Discussion questions may point out trends, make comparisons or contrasts, request clarifications, connect other theories/concepts/courses, or even relate material to your own experiences.

## **Nonprofit Organization Highlight **25 pts.****

*Purpose: To broaden students' awareness of the nonprofit sector and the large variety of nonprofit organizations, programs, and services*

Learning about the nonprofit sector means learning about specific nonprofit organizations. Throughout the semester, students will provide a 5-7 minute oral summary of a nonprofit organization of your choice. Be sure to address the NPO's purpose/mission, its programs/services, who receives or benefits from these programs/services, and the organization's source(s) of revenue. The NPO may be a local, national, or international organization but must be a registered 501(c)(3) organization. You may NOT choose campus organizations such as fraternities, sororities, or other student organizations, and you may NOT choose a nonprofit organization where you are or were a paid employee. The goal is to diversify your knowledge about NPOs.

**\*To avoid duplication with classmates, please post to the respective Discussion Board the NPO you intend to highlight.**

## **Case Study Discussion Boards**

**150 pts.**

*Purpose: To engage students in empirically-based case studies to understand and analyze real NPO challenges*

Students will have the opportunity to analyze real-life nonprofit situations using case studies based on empirical research in nonprofit contexts. Discussion questions will be provided. (Typically, they are NOT the ones in the case study book.) You will post ONE original response (your thoughts on the questions) and at least TWO peer responses (your thoughts on what at least two of your peers have posted). Original responses should succinctly demonstrate your thoughtful application of course readings and communication theory/concepts. Peer responses should extend the conversation in some way (not just agree or disagree), perhaps by sharing a personal example, adding further explanation, offering a counterpoint, or suggesting an alternate perspective/explanation/solution.

## **Application Papers**

**300 pts.**

*Purpose: To enable students to synthesize academic research and to apply communication concepts to real nonprofit organizations*

Our course takes a stakeholder approach to studying nonprofit contexts. Each week, we will turn our focus on one stakeholder group and its related communicative practices, issues, and challenges. After reading and discussing academic research, you will complete a variety of Application Papers to give you the opportunity to apply course concepts in a meaningful way. You will identify and analyze communication practices of nonprofit organizations, evaluate messages and strategies that affect nonprofit stakeholders, and create working papers that might be insightful and useful to nonprofit practitioners.

## **Oral Presentation**

**40 pts.**

*Purpose: To allow students to share analyses and enhance presentation skills*

You will create an oral presentation of your final Application Paper to share with your classmates. Your presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes in length demonstrating your application of course concepts and practical recommendations you have for the respective nonprofit organization. A grading rubric will be provided for your reference.

## **Assignments and Grading**

### **Points**

Class Participation	100
Discussion Questions (7 x 5 pts each)	35
Nonprofit Organization Highlight	25
Case Study Discussion Boards (6 x 25 pts each)	150
Application Papers (6 x 50 pts each)	300
Oral Presentation	40
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>650</b>

## **Grade Distribution (in Points Earned)**

A = 650-585

C = 519-455

B = 584-520

D = 454-390

F = 389 and below

### **A FEW NOTES ABOUT GRADES:**

- Final grades will be distributed according to the above scale. Do not expect final grades to be curved, and do not ask to be awarded those couple of extra points needed to reach the next letter grade. Remember throughout the semester that every point counts!
- It is your responsibility to keep up with your point totals. If at any time you have a question about a grade, it should be addressed within one week of receiving the grade. Grades will not be reassessed or changed after that time period. In other words, do not wait until the end of the semester to look at or question the points you have earned.
- Grades will not be provided to students via e-mail.

# STUDENT ASSISTANCE

## Student Disability Services

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at [sarc.connect@wku.edu](mailto:sarc.connect@wku.edu). Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a Faculty Notification Letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

## Title IX

WKU is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) [FOUND HERE](#) and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) [FOUND HERE](#).

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121. Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are "Responsible Employees" of the University and **MUST** report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

## Student Academic Assistance

If you have serious problems with writing (and many people do), please take advantage of the following resources, especially the Writing Center and/or The Learning Center.

- **Writing Center Assistance:** *The Writing Center on the Bowling Green campus* is offering **only** remote assistance to writers during the covid-19 pandemic. WKU students may request feedback on their writing via email or arrange a real-time Zoom conference to discuss a paper. See instructions and how-to videos on the website ([www.wku.edu/writingcenter](http://www.wku.edu/writingcenter)) for making online synchronous (Zoom) or asynchronous (email) appointments. Students may also get short writing questions answered via email; just put "Quick question" in the subject line to the [writingcenter@wku.edu](mailto:writingcenter@wku.edu).

*The WKU Glasgow START Center/Writing Center* will be offering writing tutoring sessions in synchronous online format as well as in person, by appointment only. More information on how to make appointments and what to expect from your appointment will continue to be posted at [Glasgow START Center Website](#).

- **The Learning Center** (DSU A330) provides free supplemental education programs for all currently enrolled WKU students. TLC @ Downing Student Union and TLC @ FAC offers certified, one-on-one tutoring in over 200 subjects and eight academic skill areas by appointment or walk in. Online tutoring is offered to distance learners. TLC is also a quiet study area (with side rooms designated for peer-to-peer tutoring) and offers a thirty-two machine Dell computer lab to complete academic coursework. Additionally, TLC has four satellite locations. Each satellite location is a quiet study center and is equipped with a small computer lab. These satellite locations are located in FAC, Douglas Keen Hall, McCormack Hall, and Pearce Ford Tower. Please contact TLC @ Downing Student Union for more information or to schedule a tutoring appointment. For more information, visit the [TLC Website](#) or to schedule a tutoring appointment, please call TLC at (270) 745-6254.

- The **WKU Center for Literacy** is located in Gary A. Ransdell Hall 2066. At the Center for Literacy, students can receive assistance in developing strategies to help with **reading/studying to learn** and **writing for evidence and argument**. The Center for Literacy offers both individual and small group sessions throughout the semester. Please email [literacy.center@wku.edu](mailto:literacy.center@wku.edu) to schedule an appointment or ask questions, visit the [Center for Literacy Website](#), or stop by GRH 2066 for more information.
- **Purdue Online Writing Lab** – Online assistance with APA formatting and other writing/grammar can be found at the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#).

***NOTE: The procedures and schedule in this course are subject to change as needed. Please check the course Blackboard site and your WKU email account regularly.***



## SUGGESTIONS FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Students will post at least ONE discussion question PER ARTICLE that will be integrated into our Zoom class meetings. Following is a list of suggestions to ensure you construct the kind of questions that will help guide class discussion and enhance everyone's understanding of our readings.

- Compare and contrast different perspectives taken or arguments made, and discuss what each simultaneously illuminates and makes invisible.
- Discuss how something is uniquely a communication issue, highlighting what may be the same or different across other perspectives or theories.
- Discuss how communication researchers might use the material and the pragmatic implications of its application.
- Discuss how organizational practitioners might use the material in their everyday work.
- Take issue with a particular statement or idea, and make a case for why it should be questioned or further examined.
- Note a particular statement(s) you found most interesting and why.
- Ask for clarification of a particular statement.
- Point out a similarity or contradiction with another reading.
- Relate a point to your own nonprofit experience.