

LDST 251: Group Dynamics

Spring 2006



Instructor	<p>Don Forsyth Office: 233 Jepson Hall Phone: 289-8461 Email: dforsyth@richmond.edu Office Hours: MW AM and online</p> <p>Don completed his undergraduate studies at Florida State University and his Ph.D. work at the University of Florida. He has held teaching positions at Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Kansas, and the University of Richmond (Jepson School of Leadership Studies). A social psychologist, he studies reactions to success and failure, individual difference in moral thought, applications of social psychology in educational and clinical settings, and group dynamics. He currently holds the Leo K. and Gaylee Thorsness Chair in Ethical Leadership.</p>
Course description and goals	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 (leadership, conformity, etc.)• Understanding how groups can be used to help people (therapeutic groups)• Competence in working with other people in a group context• Knowledge of major research studies of group processes• Firm grasp of theories that explain group processes• Improved proficiency in leading a group successfully <p>Beyond the content of the course—the theories and findings pertaining to groups--I hope that you use this course to develop further your already strong 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 may 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.</p>

Course Topics

Introduction	What are groups and what are their key features? What do we want to know about groups and their dynamics? What assumptions guide researchers in their studies of groups and their processes?
Research methods	How do researchers measure the way groups, and the individuals in those groups, feel, think, and behave? How do researchers search for and test their hypotheses about groups? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various research strategies used to study groups? What general theoretical perspectives guide researcher's studies of groups and the people in them?
Individuals and groups	Do humans, as a species, prefer inclusion to exclusion, group membership to isolation? How do groups combine individuals collectively? How do group experiences shape individuals' selves?
Formation	Who joins groups and who remains apart? When and why do people seek out others? Why do people deliberately create groups or join existing groups? What factors influence feelings of liking for others?
Cohesion and development	What are the components of group cohesion? How does cohesion develop over time? What are the positive and negative consequences of cohesion and commitment? Does team building enhance group productivity?
Structure	What are norms, and how do they structure interactions in groups? What are roles? Which roles occur most frequently in groups? How and why do status networks develop in groups? What factors influence the group's social structure? What are the interpersonal consequences of communication networks in groups?
Conformity and influence	When will people conform to a group's standard, and when will they remain independent? How do norms develop, and why do people obey them? Do nonconformists ever succeed in influencing rest of the group?
Power	Why are some members of groups more powerful than others? What types of power tactics are most effective in influencing others? Does power corrupt? Why do people obey authorities?
Performance	Do people perform task more effectively in groups or when they are alone? Why do people sometimes expend so little effort when they are in groups? When does a group outperform an individual?
Decision-making	What are the basic steps that groups usually follow when making decisions? Why do some highly cohesive groups make disastrous decisions? Why do groups sometimes make riskier decisions than individuals?
Leadership	What is leadership? If a group without a leader forms, which person will eventual step forward to become the leader? Should a leader be task-focused or relationship focused? Is democratic leadership superior to autocratic leadership?
Conflict	What causes disputes between groups members? When will a small disagreement escalate into a conflict? Why do groups sometimes splinter into subgroups? How can disputes in groups be resolved?
Intergroup relations	What causes disputes between groups? What changes take place as a consequence of intergroup conflict? What factors exacerbate conflict? How can intergroup conflict be resolved?
Groups in context	What impact does the social and physical setting have on an interacting group? Are groups territorial? What happens when groups are overcrowded? How do groups cope with severe environments?
Groups and change	How can groups be used to improve personal adjustment and health? What is the difference between a therapy group and self-help group? Are group approaches to treatment effective? Why do they work?
Crowds and collectives	What types of crowds are common? Why do crowds and collectives form? Do people lose their sense of self when they join crowds? When is a crowd likely to become unruly?

<p>Teaching and learning methods</p>	<p>This course will make use of many different teaching and learning methods, including discussion, lecture, activities, and online work. Each member of the group will contribute to the discussion, through presentations of particular studies, commentaries on issues, discussions of one's own personal insights, and guided review of the text material. Topics for lecture and discussion will be drawn from selected readings, the primary texts, and a number of secondary texts. Discussions will provide you the opportunity to express your understanding in your own words, and to raise questions that you find personally interesting. In addition to discussion, we will also spend our classroom time in lecture, demonstrations, activities, and audiovisual events. All activities are designed to stimulate critical thinking. If you need additional information about a topic mentioned in the text, or you have a problem understanding a particular portion of the text, just ask.</p> <p>Two aspects of the course are somewhat unique. First, we will carry out many exercises and activities that deal with groups. Teachers of group dynamics have for some time recognized the benefits of learning about groups by experiencing group processes and then analyzing the experience. Therefore, we will frequently break up into groups and afterwards examine our experiences. In many cases I will ask you to write a short paper about the experience. Also, questionnaires that measure aspects of your personalities will be administered and discussed and you will be asked to study your own behavior and the behaviors you observe.</p> <p>Second, this class also uses World Wide Web-based instruction extensively. In some cases I will email additional materials to you, and if class must be cancelled I will hold the session on-line instead. Some discussions will occur on line as well, and so will office hours. Many of the activities, papers, quizzes, and supplemental readings will also take advantage of the WWW, primarily Blackboard. If you are not familiar with Blackboard let me know and I will provide you with a tutorial. The Web Support page for this course is http://www.richmond.edu/~dforsyth/gd/</p>
<p>Textbook and readings</p>	<p>Research suggests that students acquire as much as 50% of their learning in a course directly from the textbook! In this class we will therefore rely on both a textbook as well as readings. The text is</p> <p>Forsyth, D. R. (2006). <i>Group dynamics</i> (4th ed.). Thompson/Wadsworth. ISBN ISBN: 0534368220 The website for the book is located at http://www.newtexts.com/newtexts/book.cfm?book_id=2812</p> <p>We will also supplement these books with other readings, available via Blackboard.</p>

<p>Activities and assignments</p>	<p>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 a general rule, I will describe the goals of the particular exercise in detail before you begin. An exception will only be made when full disclosure in advance would undermine the educational value of the exercise.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 quizzes, 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 in 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.</p>
<p>Feedback about progress</p>	<p>Your grade in the course will be determined by performance on an assortment of written assignments, classroom activities, quizzes, and exams.</p> <p>Assignments: Approximately 10 written assignments and graded activities will be given during the semester. Most will involve answering questions concerning a group interaction held in class. All assignments must be submitted via Blackboard (unless otherwise noted). Written assignments that are based on classroom activities can't be made-up in the case of absence. However, one extra assignment will be offered at the end of the semester that can replace any other assignment. Points are deducted if turned in late.</p> <p>Quizzes: At least four quizzes will be given during the course of the semester, and they will consist of multiple choice questions. Quizzes will usually be administered using the Blackboard, but occasionally in class. In-class quizzes will be closed-book, but Blackboard quizzes will be open-book.</p> <p>Exams: We will have 2 examinations. Naturally, items on the tests will cover all course material, no matter what its source (e.g., lecture, text, or video). The final examination will include some cumulative material, but you will be provided with a study preparation sheet for the cumulative portion of the final examination (only). Exams will be multiple choice.</p>

Grading	The distribution of grades will be based on a standard criterion referenced grading system. If you earn a certain number of points needed for a grade, you will receive that grade. Cut offs for grades are etched in stone, and based on the standard A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, etc. approach. If technical or logistical problems arise (or errors in planning must be corrected), then this system may be revised. You will be notified of any changes.
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please plan to arrive on time and remain until the final minute of class. I am careful to make certain that class does not run over, but I expect your attention for the entire class period. • Attendance is urged, but is not mandatory. If you must be absent for religious reasons, because you are involved in University-level athletics, or some other good reason, inform me by email of the conflict. • Some quizzes and in-class activities can not be made up if you miss them (because they will be based on in-class discussions and activities) but one “replacement” will be provided at the semester’s end. If you are ill on the day of the midterm examination, please leave me a voice mail message prior to the class. • The No-no’s: IMing, celling, emailing, text-messaging in class (and no extra credit). • Please be certain to review and comply with the University of Richmond academic integrity policy.
Disabilities	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require I provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking such adjustments or accommodations should follow the procedures established by the University, and contact me as soon as possible so that adjustments or accommodations can be arranged.
Sensitivity	<p>This course examines many aspects of human behavior, so students should realize that they may acquire insight into their own personalities, actions, and tendencies as a result of participation. In some cases we will complete questionnaires that measure aspects of your personalities, and our classroom discussions, the videos, and the activities will focus on many disappointing, shocking, or even disgusting aspects of human behavior. In all instances the knowledge you gain about yourself and others should be positive and useful, but it may be surprising as well. In general the goals of any particular exercise will be described beforehand except when full disclosure will undermine the educational or scientific value of the experience.</p> <p>The course also examines sensitive topics and ones where different people adopt widely differing interpretations and outlooks. All of us should strive to remain sensitive to the feelings and perspectives of others during these discussions—but also respect each others right to express their views. We must show respect for one another and for people in general, and strive at all times to avoid the use of stereotypes, labels, and personal attacks. Feel free to debate and criticize ideas, but not individuals.</p>

Calendar

The following calendar is **tentative**, only. It may be revised to reflect changes in emphasis and unexpected events that alter the plan for the course. Check the course Blackboard Page for completely up-to-date information.

Date	Topic	Chapter and Readings		Quizzes, Activities, Assignments
Jan 16-18	Introduction to Groups	1	Hackman (2003).	Assignment 1: <i>My Groups</i>
Jan 23-25	Studying Groups	2	De Waal, (2005)	Quiz 1 Assignment 2: <i>Observe Groups</i>
Jan 30-Feb1	Individuals in groups	3	Ellis (1980)	Assignment 3: <i>Who am I</i>
Feb 6-8	Forming	4	Pavelshak et al. (1986)	Quiz 2 Assignment 4: <i>Social Exchange</i>
Feb 13-15	Cohesion	5	Aronson & Mills (1959)	
Feb 20-22	Group Structure	6	Perkins (2002)	Assignment 5: <i>Structure</i>
Feb 27	Leadership Emergence	pp. 379-90		
Mar 1	MIDTERM EXAM			
Mar 13-15	Influence	7	Latané (1981)	Assignment 6 <i>Influence</i>
Mar 20-22	Power	8	Pratkanis & Aronson (1992)	Quiz 3
Mar 27-29	Performance	9	Bennis & Biederman (1997)	Assignment 7: <i>Steiner</i>
Apr 3-5	Decision Making	10	Pisano et al (2001)	Assignment 8: <i>Groupthink</i>
Apr 10-12	Conflict and Intergroup Conflict	12, 13	Forsyth et al (2002) Wright et al (1997)	Quiz 4 Assignment 9: <i>Towers</i>
Apr 17-19	Groups in Context	14	Vinsel et al (1980)	Assignment 10: <i>Offices</i>
Apr 24-26	Change Groups Large Groups	15, 16	Turner (2000) Vider (2004)	Assignment 11: <i>Groups</i>
May	Final Examination			

Notes:

1. The reading load is heavier in the second half of the semester.
2. Quizzes and activities are assigned nearly every day during the semester.
3. In general, you will have 5-7 days to complete an assignment or quiz. The due dates listed here are tentative only, and will be adjusted during the course of the semester. Consult the due dates in Blackboard to be certain of when assignments are due.