SW 321 – Basics of Professional Communication

Office Hours

Credits 3

Prerequisites SW 101, SW 250, ENG 101, ENG 102, PSY 101

COURSE DESCRIPTION
SW 321 focuses on the development of basic communication and observational skills needed for subsequent social work methods courses. Communication topics to be addressed include: active listening, questioning, empathetic responding, paraphrasing, summarizing, persuasive writing, and non-verbal communication. Emphasis will be placed on developing observation and communication skills that capture events in ways that are descriptive, accurate, and unbiased. Given the importance of nonjudgmental and unbiased communication to rapport, the course will examine the role of power differentials, gender, culture, class, context, and ethnicity/race on professional communication.

COURSE LINKAGES
SW 321 provides opportunities for students to develop the communication skills essential to professional practice. These skills will form the foundation on which much of the professional sequence builds, in particular all four of the Social Work Methods Courses, e.g. SW 420, SW 421, SW 424, and SW 427. In addition, students will be expected to demonstrate these skills in SW 480—Field Practicum I and SW 481—Field Practicum II.

Relevant BSW Program Competencies
In accordance with the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE) 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), the program prepares BSW students who:

2.1.1 Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly
2.1.2 Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice
2.1.3 Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgment
2.1.4 Engage diversity and difference in practice
2.1.5 Advance human rights and social and economic justice
2.1.10 Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.
Course Objectives / Educational Outcomes:
At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

321. 1 Use verbal following skills, including paraphrasing, summarizing, focusing, and furthering in interaction with others

321. 2 Convey openness and interest using non-verbal communication

321. 3 Establish rapport, provide empathetic responses and use open and close-ended questions to elicit information from others

321. 4 Receive and provide feedback on communication skills

321. 5 Articulate the influence of personal values on interpersonal communication

321. 6 Write reports and descriptions that are accurate, informative, and devoid of judgmental language

321. 7 Analyze the relationship between personal values and professional values

321. 8 Identify evidence in support of basic communication skills, including empathy, active listening, and non-verbal communication

321. 9 Apply relevant NASW ethical principles to practice scenarios

321. 10 Recognize and articulate personal biases in oneself

321. 11 Engage in communication that reflects an awareness of personal biases

321. 12 Communicate personal beliefs without harm to others

321. 13 Identify and assess the influence of culture on patterns of communication

321. 14 Assume a humble, inquisitive and respectful position in all communication (apply cultural humility to interaction and communications with others)

321. 15 Assess sources of power and how power manifests in all forms of communication

321. 16 Reflect upon and identify sources of power within one’s own life

321. 17 Examine the influence of context on communication and interaction
Instructional Methods

This course will implement a variety of collaborative learning techniques. Some of these techniques will include: lecture, class discussion, small group activities, role plays, fishbowl activities and videos.

Course Policies

- **Class Attendance and Participation:** As much of the learning in this class is dependent upon class member contributions, you will be expected to come prepared and ready to actively participate in every class meeting. Active participation will include: involvement in class activities and discussions, timeliness to class, and collegial conduct.

  Students who miss 2 class sessions will lose 10 points. Students who miss 3 class sessions will lose 15 points. Those students who miss 4 or more class sessions will receive a grade of “F” for the course.

- **Audio and Video Recordings:** To protect the privacy of other class members, students may not record class lectures or labs without consent from the Instructor. Consent will only be given to those students who request accommodations for a disability and show evidence of the need for said accommodation from the DRC.

  A central component of this class entails pre-professional simulations. To enhance learning and skill growth these simulations will be recorded by the Instructor. The Instructor and classmates may view these recordings to provide students feedback on skill use. All recordings will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the class and recordings will be used only for the purposes of feedback within this class. Students will sign a release to record at the start of the first class.

- **Disabilities:** Students who have documented disabilities that may affect their learning or performance in this class should contact the UNR Disability Services Office (Thompson Student Services Building, room 101). The instructor will make all those accommodations that are requested in writing by the aforementioned office.

- **Academic Success Services:** Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or www.unr.edu/writing_center). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

- **Academic Dishonesty:** “Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses” constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student's enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the [UNR General Catalog](#).
Course Requirements

Required Readings: You will be expected to have completed all assigned readings prior to the class session. Assigned readings can be found in the Course Calendar.


- Course reserves available through the Knowledge Center

Assignments

*Professional Letter and E-mail Assignment*
A significant focus within this class includes written as well as verbal communication. In this assignment, you will be given several scenarios related to social service provision. You will be asked to write both a professional letter advocating a specific position related to one of the scenarios as well as an e-mail in response to a request present within the scenario. Both documents are due in hard copy form on 12/09 and are worth 10 points each

**Letter:** In writing the letter, you must: 1) target the most appropriate audience for your advocacy, 2) identify your position and communicate your concern as well as a proposed solution, 3) explain your interest and any relevant roles that make you knowledgeable about the issue, 4) support your position and 5) write clearly with no grammatical or typographical errors.

**E-mail:** In writing the e-mail, you must: 1) target the appropriate audience, 2) identify the subject of the e-mail, 3) provide a greeting 4) communicate all information relevant to the request, 5) raise one question relevant to the request and 6) write clearly with no grammatical or typographical errors.

*Observational Paper*
Accurate observation and non-biased description are essential to good professional communication and eventually to professional practice. For this assignment, you will be shown a brief video and then will be asked to write a paper detailing your observations from the video. You will need to describe in detail: the physical setting, the interaction between relevant people, and the physical appearance of the people in the video. Your descriptions must rely on non-biased and non-judgmental language. Additionally, your descriptions must be accurate.

*Weekly Skill Building Activities*
As this class focuses largely on skill development, you will be graded on your demonstration of these skills in class. These assignments will be completed in class and will be worth 3 points each. There will be a total of ten such assignments spread throughout the semester. Examples of topics for the assignments include: provision of peer feedback, accurate reporting of a brief exchange, use of open-ended questioning, ability to paraphrase or summarize, identification feelings in interaction, use of a level four empathetic response, and cultural humility. Students
must be present in the class to complete the assignments. Make-up assignments will not be provided.

**Quizzes**

Rather than having one or two big exams, students will complete three short quizzes. These quizzes will test their understanding of concepts presented in the readings and in class. Quizzes will include multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. Each quiz is worth ten points.

**Recorded Simulation Interviews**

Progression in the program and readiness for field are largely determined by performance and communication skills. To ensure that you have made adequate progress in the communication skills taught in this class, you will complete two recorded simulations interviews. Each simulation will place in in the role of engaging in professional communication within a social services setting. Both interviews will be completed during the lab portion of the course. Interviews will last 5 minutes. In addition to the interview, you will be provided with a self-evaluation sheet, which you will use to evaluate your communication skills evidenced in the video. Upon completing your second interview, you will reflect on progress made from the first interview as well as what skills still need improvement. Your grade on this assignment will be based on both your use of skills as well as your reflection on what you did and did not do well. These simulations are worth 100 points.

**Grading**

- **Grading:** Grades will be awarded based upon your performance on the aforementioned course requirements.

  | Skill-Building Activities | 10% |
  | Quizzes                  | 15% |
  | Professional Letter and Email | 15% |
  | Observation Paper        | 10% |
  | Simulations              | 50% |

The following scale will be used to determine letter grades:

- 190 or higher      A
- 180 – 189      A-
- 174 – 179      B+
- 168 – 173      B
- 160 – 167      B-
- 154 – 159      C+
- 148 – 153      C
- 140 – 147      C-
- 134 – 139      D+
- 128 – 133      D
- 120 – 127      D-
- 119 or less     F


## Sample Course Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Introductions and Course Overview</td>
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<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Rapport and Helping</td>
<td>Koprowska, chapters 1 and 2</td>
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<td>Week Three</td>
<td>The Power of Observation</td>
<td>Mindfulness packet (Webcampus)</td>
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<td><strong>Quiz 1</strong></td>
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<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Nonverbal Communication</td>
<td>Koprowska, chapter 3</td>
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<td><em>Observation Paper Due</em></td>
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<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Verbal Following – Basic Skills</td>
<td>Basic Skills packet (Webcampus)</td>
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<td><strong>First Simulation Recordings</strong></td>
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<td>Week Nine</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Empathy Handouts (Webcampus)</td>
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<td><strong>Quiz 2</strong></td>
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<td>Week Ten</td>
<td>Aggression and Hostility in Communication</td>
<td>Koprowska, chapter 8</td>
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<td>Week Eleven</td>
<td>Veterans Day</td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<td>Week Thirteen</td>
<td>Family Day – Thanksgiving</td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<td><strong>Second Simulation Recordings</strong></td>
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<td><em>Letter and E-mail Due</em></td>
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<td><strong>Second Simulation Recordings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam Week</td>
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<td><em>Quiz 3</em></td>
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