

Fundamentals of Business and Leadership Communications Course Description and Syllabus

3 Credits
Spring 2023 Term
Day and Time: TBD
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Student Target: Early-stage BBA, BA or BS students

Course Description & Rationale | Why should students enroll in this class?

The Fundamentals of Business & Leadership Communications course will provide students with concepts and techniques for effective written and verbal communication and personal presentation within corporate or other organizational settings. Designed to complement more technical knowledge of business principles and practices, this course will emphasize the experience of the individual as a communicator and will develop practical communications skills for employment exploration and early-career advancement.

The course addresses three principal areas: 1.) personal communications focused on the optimal presentation of oneself within a business or organizational context; 2.) practical business communication skills, including business writing and presentation delivery; and 3.) leadership communications in the service of business ethics, management and conflict resolution.

After completing this course, students will have an understanding of how effective communications skills can help them obtain employment and succeed at work, and how to use these skills to advance themselves and the business interests of their employers.

Course Work | What will students do in this class?

This class focuses on practical skill acquisition through active participation in classroom discussions, engagement in collaborative exercises and in the completion of assignments.

In this in-person course, students will experience instructional lectures, group discussions, presentations by and discussions with guest speakers, and assignments centered on concepts learned in class, provided resources such as videos, audios and written material.

The course is presented in three segments. To develop personal communications skills, students will initially focus on the presentation of themselves. Students will pursue strengths awareness, create resumes and public professional profiles, write personal statements and draft cover letters. They will engage in roleplay and will learn to build, and effectively communicate within, a professional network.

In the next segment, students will develop business communication skills centered on “real world” business scenarios. They will prepare presentations and written business communications in response to prompts tied to classroom learning, and will additionally deliver projects that align with common business situations. Students will practice with positive and negative messaging and various formats (letters, email, presentations, informal communications), sharing their work for feedback and revision.

In the final segment, students will learn how to integrate leadership principles into communication practices, emphasizing ethics, inclusivity, effective meeting management, and conflict navigation. Listening and feedback techniques will be emphasized.

Learning Outcomes | What will students be able to do after taking this class?

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Understand the communications standards and behavioral expectations within a corporate environment.
2. Confidently and appropriately present oneself, express one’s ideas, construct effective business messages, and manage interpersonal workplace conflicts.
3. Apply business communications standards to written documents (letters, proposals and updates/reports), presentations, digital platforms, collaborative projects, and personal interactions with colleagues, clients, vendors and other business partners.
5. Use the communications tools created in the course to facilitate an internship, career exploration or job search and to succeed in early-career roles.

Evaluation | How will student performance be measured?

Student evaluation will reflect in-class participation, the quality of completed assignments.

Class Attendance and Active Participation	25%
Personal Communications - Employment Suite	25%
Business & Leadership Communications Assignments & Presentations	50%

About the Instructor | Sarah Dyer

Sarah Dyer is a communications and organizational leadership professional who has served large and small companies in the financial services industry, as well as nonprofit organizations and social enterprises. A dominant theme in her professional life has been hands-on, pragmatic advocacy for diversity and equity within the financial services industry. She is a co-founder, former chief marketing officer, former Asia Pacific director, and current board member of 100 Women in Finance, a global organization of more than 20,000 members in 30 locations, missioned to advance the careers of women working within the financial services industry and to enable greater access to internships and jobs within industry for pre-career women, especially those from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, Sarah is the founding chair of the Asian University for Women's New York Advisory Board, a group of NYC-based executives who advocate for the Bangladesh-based liberal arts college serving first-generation students from south and central Asia. Sarah is a graduate of Colgate University and completed post-graduate coursework at The University of Hong Kong.

Proposed 15-Week Course Schedule

Segment 1: Personal Communications (5 Weeks)

This segment is designed to equip students with the skills and confidence to successfully present themselves in a business setting, with a focus on obtaining and sustaining early-career employment. Student work will result in a useful suite of assets and learned behaviors that support an internship or job search and the construction of a professional network.

Lecture Modules and Discussion Topics	Student Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Personal vs. Professional Self● Strengths Awareness● Demystifying Business Culture● Constructing a Professional Image and Reputation; Personal Branding● Role Models, Mentors, Professional Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Complete a strengths assessment & reflection● Create a suite of personal communications tools, including a personal statement, a resume, a cover letter template● Create a LinkedIn & Handshake profile● Perfect an “elevator” introduction of oneself

Week 1 | Personal vs. Professional Identities

In this class, we will discuss the differences and congruities between one’s personal self and one’s professional identity. We will recognize the role that our cultural backgrounds, personal values, ambitions, strengths and fears play in the way we see ourselves and how we communicate with others. We will additionally discuss how one’s professional identity can be consciously developed to reflect how one wishes to be understood by others in a professional business setting. We will begin to explore what it means to be oneself while conforming to the communications and behavioral standards of the corporate workplace.

Assignment:

- Record a one-minute video introducing yourself to your instructor. Include a few details about yourself and what you hope to gain from taking this class.
- Complete a strengths assessment (TBD - Gallup Strengthsquest, MyersBriggs, or comparable CCNY recommendation)
- Write a reflection on the key findings. What did the assessment reveal about you? What feels true to you and why? What surprised you and why? What do you disagree with, and why? How might these results help you to present yourself to a potential employer, or to someone with whom you’d wish to network?

Week 2 | Talking about Yourself in the Business World

Knowing how to confidently introduce and talk about oneself is one of the most important communications skills for establishing a favorable professional identity (sometimes called a “personal brand”). It is also essential for building a helpful network and securing a corporate position. In this session, students will learn and practice how to present themselves, their skills, interests and ambitions in ways that are relevant in a business context. This week’s additional focus is on navigating the challenging intersection of personal and professional identities on social media platforms, and on addressing best practices for the latter.

Assignment:

- *Write a 3 -7 sentence personal statement that answers the following questions: Who am I? What are my capabilities? What do I care about or stand for? Where am I headed? What do I want?*
- *Visit the Office of Student Success. Register for a career exploration program, an information session by a corporate recruiter, and/or for a consultation with one of the Student Success officers.*
- *Using a recommended format, prepare an initial draft (or revise) your business resume, with a focus on your current and developing skills.*

Week 3 | Positive Communications Habits - Part A (Written and Verbal)

This class addresses positive habits with written and verbal communication that will contribute to success in a job search and in launching a career. Discussion will cover: making requests, scheduling an appointment, responding to an inquiry, offering assistance, expressing thanks, apologizing and assertive follow up.

Guest speaker: Representative from LinkedIn or an early-career coach

Assignment:

- *Set up a Handshake and a LinkedIn profile.*
- *Identify an actual posting for an internship or job (either on LinkedIn or elsewhere) and write an outreach communication to the recruiter expressing interest in the role. Use language from your personal statement and cite details from your resume to persuade the recruiter to schedule an interview with you. [You need not actually contact the recruiter at this point, but the job posting must be real].*

Week 4 | Positive Communications Habits - Part B (Nonverbal Communication)

Communication in corporate settings requires a special set of situational behaviors that help individuals perform their duties and enable businesses to efficiently function. This class addresses these skills, and also the “code switching” that is often necessary to effectively navigate corporate settings. Students will learn about the importance of nonverbal communication (personal appearance, dress, eye contact, tone, respecting personal space, punctuality, sustained attention, body language, etc.) and how to use it to their advantage in business. Balanced attention will be devoted to on-line meetings.

Assignment:

- *Practice making a positive first impression to a potential employer by recording a short video of you introducing yourself, highlighting the key elements of your personal statement. In this video, wear clothing appropriate for the introduction, and be mindful of visible background, your body language, your tone and energy level.*
- *Share the video with a small group of students for critique.*
- *Submit the video and the critique.*

Week 5 | Role Models, Mentors and a Network - Getting Started

Most business people credit their role models, mentors and the power of their network as very important factors in their career success. Forging relationships with others who can help support one’s career growth requires special communications strategies and approaches. In this class, we will discuss how role models, mentors and a professional network can be identified and activated, and how to achieve reciprocity within these relationships for lasting benefit.

In this class, students will reflect on those they aspire to emulate and why, those they can go to for advice, and the type of people they wish to be connected to as part of their professional network. Students will further refine their personal statement into an “elevator” introduction.

Assignments:

- *Write an outreach communication to someone you have just met, ask to connect and stay in touch.*
- *Write an outreach communication for making a cold network connection, addressing why you wish to connect and what you can offer.*

Segment 2: Business Communications (6 Weeks)

In this second phase of the class, students will learn to create business messages that meet corporate standards. Students will gain a practical understanding of effective business writing and verbal presentation in terms of content and delivery. Real world business cases will be presented for review and analysis and students will apply their learning to assignments reflecting common business situations.

Lecture Modules and Discussion Topics	Student Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and Anticipating the Audience's Perspective and Needs• Business Writing Conventions - Content, Style, Accuracy and Brevity• Written Presentation Formats - Memos, Letters, Proposals, Reports, Informal Updates, Text and Messaging, Social Media• Verbal Presentation - Explaining, Selling, Defending and Inspiring• Visual Enhancement to Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create typical written business communications• Create and deliver a business presentation

Week 6 | Communicating about Business - Context and Knowing your Audience

Good business communications start with a basic understanding and ability to discuss a business's value proposition, how it makes a profit, its placement in the overall economy and where it stands in the competitive landscape. Increasingly, many companies additionally define themselves in terms of their broader purpose.

In this class, we will evaluate actual corporate messaging and explore how businesses wish to be understood by their customers, employees and the broader market. Students will learn this context, explore the language of business and learn how to apply this language to their communications. We will additionally address the perspective of different business audiences - clients, colleagues, vendors, partners and the public - and how messaging shifts to suit their needs and interests.

Guest Speaker: Corporate Communications Expert

Assignment:

- *Imagine a fictitious company that you would wish to work for. Write a 150-200 word corporate biography statement about the company explaining what it does*

and how it makes a profit (or sustains itself if your company is a nonprofit corporation). Identify its reason for existence and any special differentiating features about this company.

- *Expand the above with some aspirational commentary regarding how you envision the client's experience with this company, the employee's experience with the company and the public's perception of this company.*

Week 7 | Writing for a Business Audience (Part A) - What's the Message?

Clear, accurate and appropriate interpersonal written communication with other employees and business stakeholders is an important measure of job performance. This class will examine standard forms of interpersonal correspondence in a corporate setting (email, voicemail, letters and text/messaging), the essential content for each, and the best practices for delivering your message. We will address how to express corporate values and voice in your messages, and handle both positive and negative messages.

Assignment: In response to provided prompts and guidelines, prepare and submit the following using the principles discussed in class and the appropriate format:

- *A message to your direct manager with an update on a project*
- *A message responding to a complaint from a customer*
- *A message to a peer colleague about the status of your contribution to a project*
- *A message to a vendor about an unsatisfactory product delivery*
- *A message to a colleague expressing appreciation for their assistance*

Week 8 | Writing for a Business Audiences (Part B)

In business, one often must write to a group or for an official record. This class examines business writing scenarios, such as preparing a meeting agenda, authoring project notes, summarizing a report or an article, forwarding relevant materials/documents, or entering customer summaries in CRM software.

Assignment:

- *Read a provided business news article or report (or find one of your own).*
- *Prepare and submit a communication to your manager that explains how it is relevant to the business you described in Week 6's assignment. Summarize the article's most important points and express your point of view. Your communication should respect your manager's limited time and attention.*

Week 9 | Speaking to a Business Audience (Part A) - Informal Communication

In business, one needs to be able to verbally address a group of people, either spontaneously in casual settings or occasionally with a prepared presentation. This class addresses effective verbal presentation techniques for typical informal business scenarios such as speaking in business meetings, introducing parties who do not know one another, handling inquiries, and positively engaging with customers and other employees. We will address opportunities for appropriate and engaging “small talk” and rapport building, as well as guidelines for out-of-office socializing.

Assignment:

- *Review provided video links to evaluate four different business presentations*
- *Prepare a short reflection for each video. What aspects of each presentation did you find to be effective or ineffective and why? Please also comment on each of the speakers' delivery including voice, appearance and presence. What could each have done more effectively?*

Week 10 | Speaking to a Business Audience (Part B) - Making Effective Presentation

This class addresses the basic structure, content and delivery techniques for a standard business presentation. Students will learn key features and organization of a traditional presentation, how to use visual supports to enhance presentations, how to make a point, and how to respond to Q&A. The class will learn about vocal delivery (volume, tone and pace), body language, and establishing a presence.

Assignment:

- *Using the framework presented in class, prepare a five-minute presentation that introduces a specific audience to a business topic about which you are knowledgeable (an upcoming corporate event, a new product launch, or maybe a change in business process). The goal of your presentation is to provide basic information designed around your audience's needs. Your presentation should contain at least two visual supports.*
- *Practice delivering your presentation to at least two other students.*
- *Submit a video of yourself delivering the presentation.*

Week 11 | Speaking to a Business Audience (Part C) - Workshop

In this workshop session, students will deliver their short presentations to groups of other students for feedback. Students should attend class dressed for business.

Assignment: Read provided selections (TBD) to prepare for the course's final segment.

Segment 3: Leadership Communications (4 Weeks)

In this final segment, students will integrate leadership practices into business communications for greater effectiveness. Guest lecturers from industry leaders will be secured for select topics.

Lecture Modules and Discussion Topics	Student Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ethical Communication - Establishing Trust and Upholding Values● Meeting Management● Inclusive Communications● Active Listening, Feedback and Accountability● Stress Management● Conflict Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Produce a mock business meeting● Participate in a networking session with industry professionals

Week 12 | Communications Ethics and Values

In business, transparency, honesty, integrity and inclusivity are typically stated values. This class addresses trustworthy communication practices and common ethical challenges related to communications. Students will learn about creating accurate and balanced narratives, delivering sound presentation of data, properly sourcing content, understanding confidentiality and privacy, and ensuring inclusive perspective-taking.

This session may include a guest lecture.

Assignment:

- *Review provided video clips of business meetings.*
- *Prepare a short written reflection for each video. What aspects of each meeting did you find to be effective or ineffective and why? What business communications practices did you observe? How do you evaluate the meeting leader's performance in each situation?*

Week 13 | Meeting Management

Business meetings are opportunities to exchange information, share opinions and make decisions. In this class, students will learn the fundamental process for organizing and directing an effective and inclusive business meeting. Focus will be on creating an agenda, inviting participants, facilitating discussion, seeking diverse viewpoints, driving toward desired

outcomes and discussion documentation. Students will also learn how to be an active, valuable participant in a business meeting.

This session may include a guest presentation with in-class role play.

Assignment: In response to a provided prompt, and in small groups, conduct a mock business meeting. Groups will:

- *Prepare an agenda and identify the roles of the needed participants.*
- *Prepare an invitation to the participants, explaining their role in the meeting.*
- *Conduct a short meeting (can be over Zoom) by applying the principles learned in class.*
- *Prepare the meeting notes.*
- *Submit the video and the meeting notes.*

Week 14 | Managing Stress and Resolving Conflict

This class focuses on handling challenging workplace situations and resolving interpersonal conflict. Using skills learned throughout the course, students will role-play in common workplace situations including delivering and receiving negative feedback, handling mistakes, and interaction with difficult managers, colleagues and clients. Students will learn practices for active listening, accountability, and self-advocacy at work.

This session may include a guest lecture.

Assignment:

- *Prepare for Week 15's interactive session with industry professionals (TBD)*

Week 15 | Pulling it All Together and Taking Next Steps - TBD

The final class of term is envisioned to be an interactive session with industry representatives designed in collaboration with the Colin Powell School's Office of Student Success. Students will introduce themselves, present what they've learned in the class, and practice their networking skills with working business professionals.