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COMM 403   
Coursework Paper

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 Reflecting back on all of my courses I’ve taken since freshman year in 2008, I will highlight 3 Communication courses as well as Advertising 215 and Computer Science 101. I have learned the most ideas, concepts and skills as they apply to communication in these classes. The three courses are COMM 100: Principles of Human Communication, COMM 112: Small Group Communication and COMM 308: Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction.  
 COMM 100: Principles of Human Communication is an introduction to the human communication process with emphasis on the principles, variables, and social contexts of communication. I took this class first semester, freshmen year with Sean Horan and it was the first time I was exposed to the major and then could determine if it would be something that I would potentially be interested in. This class served as a great introduction to the major of Communication Studies and led me to decide that Communication Studies was the major I wanted to pursue. The class covered the broad spectrum of Communication and touched upon nearly every topic in which there was a Communication class devoted so I could pursue those content areas in future semesters. This, in turn, really helped me in the long run and I had a great time learning about numerous aspects of Communication that I was never previously aware of and Sean made the class very fun and enjoyable.   
 The first chapter of COMM 100 discusses ethics in Communication. Ethics are something that is continually discussed when talking about the workforce. Ones ethics and morals are always under scrutiny when they are in business and their trust and honesty is at stake. Some important things we learned in regards to ethics are the components of morality and questions to ask when making ethical decisions. The components of morality are moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation and moral character. Of these, I believe the most important component would be moral character, which is defined as one’s persistence, courage, energy and focus to do what is ethically right. In the workplace you will be exposed to many scenarios in which your ethics and morals will be challenged and will be the deciding factor in your actions. For example, using your personal bias against a customer or business, which in turn cause financial problems with your own company, would prove to be very unethical. Even though you have issues with this business or customer you should not bring it upon yourself to causes financial loss and distress to your company. You must focus on your moral character and realize that you must do what is ethically right for your business. There are multiple questions one can ask when making an ethical decision. For example, “How do I feel about myself and the choice I am making?” “Can I justify my choice to society?’ And, “Are there precedents in making my choice?” By asking these questions before making a decision one may avoid a lot of future problems. I will be much more aware of the ethical decisions I have to make when I am working as a result of this class.  
 COMM 112: Small Group Communication is a course, designed to introduce students to the small group communication process. Through lecture, group projects, presentations and individual assignments, we developed an understanding of the small group communication process and learned how to effectively communicate when working with a small group. This class was my first true experience working in a small group. I was randomly assigned to a group of 4 people and we were instructed to pick a local organization in which we would perform multiple hours of community service for throughout the semester. None of us were friends previously and it was up to the group to get along, adapt to one another and elect a group leader. I was actually the one appointed to be the group leader and was assigned specific responsibilities which the other members did not have. I was in control of picking the volunteer organization, scheduling our meeting times, making an agenda and making contact with the group members whether it was by email or by phone. This was a perfect hands-on training of a situation that will definitely occur in any job I have in the future. I learned organization and time management skills.   
 We decided to pick St. John’s University Parish and agreed that we would meet there every Tuesday and Thursday of the semester at 9:00 a.m. and would volunteer for 2 hours each visit. Upon our arrival, we were introduced to Brother Greg and he informed us on the numerous tasks we would be performing over the semester. We did all kinds of things such as, setting up for meetings, organizing books in the pews, hanging flags outside the church, cleaning up garbage around the area and weeding the surrounding gardens. We had very limited time each day to accomplish all of these tasks and it truly was a group effort to get it done.   
 Much of what we learned in class we applied to our volunteer work, which can also be applied to the workforce as well. The 4 guidelines of ethics of small group membership proved to help us along the way and we were able to use it to keep us on track. The first guideline is members should not withhold information and we exercised this guideline by letting one another know if someone in the group was not contributing equally. If you are not happy in the workplace and keep quiet about topics and do not express your feelings then nothing will change. The second guideline is members should be truthful and accurate when sharing info. There is no need to lie about the performance of others and throwing people under the bus is very unethical. However, if someone is truly slacking off and not doing their part there is nothing wrong with letting the group know as long as you are truthful and do it in a positive, solution oriented way. The third guideline is members should reveal all sources of information. This entails letting someone know where and when he or she heard information from a certain person. If one of my group members said I was being very lazy that afternoon I would want to know who told him that and when it occurred. This will also eliminate rumors or false accusations. A very similar situation like this could easily occur in the workplace as well. The last guideline is members should respect dissent by recognizing the diversity of argument and opinion that can exist. We experienced this during our decision to pick our group name and our assignment of roles during our volunteer hours. We were all from different areas and like different things and excel at different tasks. Our ideas clashed at times but we managed to adapt to one another’s decision and could agree upon nearly everything without a problem.   
 These four guidelines go hand in hand with the four communication strategies we learned in that class as well. The first is to communicate from the first group meeting. By doing so you are able to build a relationship where you are comfortable enough to reveal information in a truthful manner and reveal all the sources from which you heard it. The second is engage in frequent quality communication. We did this not only in person but also on the phone and through email as well. This built trust in one another and also kept the group on top of our tasks. By exercising these two steps in the workplace one will find themselves quickly adapting to their environment and co-workers and being more productive in the long run. The third and fourth are demonstrate good character and listen to one another. We constantly had to keep these two strategies in mind because not only were we working in church representing the WVU Communication Department but most importantly we were representing ourselves. Showing respect and acting professionally at all times are important qualities to have not only in life but in the workplace as well.   
 COMM 308: Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction is an examination of the effects of the human nonverbal behavior on human communication. Going into the class I thought I was not going to learn anything and that it was going to be pointless but I soon found out how vital nonverbal communication is in being a successful communicator. The Effects of Physical Characteristics on Human Communication was a topic of discussion that really interested me. We talked about our general physical appearance and I was not aware of how important it truly is in regards to how we are perceived by others and judgment is made strictly based on looks. First impressions are vitally important in a professional setting like business.   
 Our physical appearance is the first thing people see and has a strong influence on whether or not someone will talk with us. Judgments are made upon the first interaction and appearance may influence relational development and interpersonal responses. This is an important consideration to keep in mind when you are interviewing for a job. You have to dress to impress and try to “one up” your competition by any means necessary and looking good is a very easy way. However, physical attractiveness is not always beneficial and this was a concept I had a hard time understanding at first. I learned that that the higher level of advancement one has in the workplace the more important it is for one’s physical attractiveness to be viewed as task attractiveness and not social attractiveness. Avoid just trying to look good for the office but not playing the role that goes along with it. This made it clear for me and is now something I can take into consideration when I enter the workforce. In regards to persuading others, research shows that attractive people are generally more successful at getting what they want. By simply cleaning yourself up everyday and staying on top of your appearance you can draw new customers and cliental in. Attractive men and women are believed to have better sales skills and are treated more cordially. In turn this will boost your self-esteem and will keep you focused and on track. In summary, be as attractive as you can be. Although someone may be a little smarter and may have a better sense of what they are doing if you look nicer than them in the interview and show confidence you just may get the job over them.   
 Another fascinating aspect of nonverbal communication that we learned had to do with oculesics, proxemics and haptics. The study of oculesics shows that it can be responsible for significant impressions especially in a professional setting. For example its more professional and proper to look someone directly in the eye when you first meet and engage in a conversation. Conversely when you avoid direct eye contact you immediately convey to your interviewer that you are imitated, lack confidence and you are insecure. In general when you avoid eye contact you lose trust with the person you are talking to.   
 Proxemics is the study of the use and perception of social and personal space. This looks at the human tendency to stake out personal territory or untouchable space. I learned the acceptable distances one should stand during many different interactions. For example, you will stand a lot further away from your boss when you are talking then when you are talking with your very close friend. By encroaching on one’s personal space you may come off as aggressive and over confident. Always keep space in mind when interacting with others because it is a huge factor regarding successful communication.  
 Haptics examines all the aspects of touch. Touch can elicit negative and positive reactions. Touch is probably one of the most impactful forms of communication and is almost the basic form of communication. It is also a very powerful mode of communication but also most ambiguous, which makes it troublesome. Knowing who to touch, how to touch and when to touch are three very important concepts to consider in the workplace. Touch has a great impact on people and can involve support, reassurance and appreciation. Shaking an employer’s hand is an example of social touch and is something you would definitely want to do when you meet them. A firm handshake shows that you are confident and seem prepared. However, hugging an employer is never something you would not want to do until a relationship was built where that would be found as being acceptable. Touch may also be used as influence. When the goal of the touch is to persuade others to do something than it is associated with influence. For example in a study, research has shown that people who are touched are more likely to sign petitions and are more likely to answer questions on surveys. Touch really becomes acceptable in the workplace when it is task related. There are times when we have to touch someone to accomplish something and there is just no way around it. Some examples of this would be a dentist, a barber and getting someone who is handicapped out of a car. If touch were not used in these circumstances then nothing would get accomplished. A form of touch you want to avoid and monitor in the work place is a touch adaptor. There two kinds of touch adaptors which are self-adaptors: nonverbal acts where a person manipulates his or her body for example twirling hair and scratching your chin and object adaptors: unconscious manipulation of an object for example tapping your pen or twisting your ring. By expressing these two forms of touch you come across as nervous, anxious and unconfident to your interviewer or employer.   
 I have taken many courses outside the department, but the two that I find most beneficial are Computer Science 101 and Advertising 215. Computer Science 101 is an introduction course to all of Microsoft Office. Throughout the semester you will learn how to master Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access. Using computer applications such as these enable you to create technical reports and presentations. Almost every company uses Microsoft Excel and some jobs titles require you to know how to operate the program. We learned how to make detailed spreadsheets by incorporating formulas and inserting commands. These spreadsheets can be used for all kinds of work related issues. For example, how your doing overall for the year, how a certain product is doing for your business and how you project your sales to go for the current year compared to the last. All of this is information can be accessible through Microsoft Excel.  
 Advertising 215 is an introduction to all sides of the advertising field. I really enjoyed this class because it was my first exposure to the field of advertising. We learned how advertising is a form of persuasive communication and we examined the process through which brand messages are created to achieve marketing goals. Advertising is all around us and we are actually exposed to over 3000 advertising messages per day. This was something I would never be able to fathom prior to joining this class. Learning about the components of advertising will help me not only in the advertising field but other fields as well. The four components are strategy, creativity, execution and media. Strategy entails the logic and planning of an ad, which is then followed by the creativity on how to develop the ad to meet objectives. How you execute or direct the ad to your audience will determine its success. Through the media advertisers run ads in order to receive the best return on their investments. Overall, this course made me a much more educated consumer and gave me insight on why I make the decisions I do.   
 When looking back and comparing and contrasting my different coursework experiences I would say for example small group communication and nonverbal communication fall into similar categories because they deal with more behavioral issues in regards to communication. On the other hand, classes like Computer Science and Journalism are different because they deal with more quantitative aspects of communication such as the written word and the use of excel spreadsheets to express oneself. While working at Avis I am able to examine a lot of people’s nonverbal behaviors and can adapt my behavior to their feelings. For example, when they are in a rush and look frustrated I try to move as quickly as possible. However, when they approach the desk with a smile I always try to make conversation to improve relations.  
 My most applicable work experience, although it was not a job in communications per se, (I have not completed my internship yet) was at Avis Car Rental, where I have worked for the last 6 months. My job title is Valet. However, because we are such a small office in terms of number of employees, my boss has allowed me to get involved in activities that go above and beyond my true job description. The primary focus of my job responsibilities have to do with customer service. I am the one who delivers the car to the renter, so after their initial contact with the office, I am the face of Avis, so to speak. It is very important how I present myself to the customer. For example I have to address the customer by name, shake their hand, offer help getting into the car or with luggage and packages. Some of the skills I learned in Nonverbal Communication have come into play very often on this job. Even though sometimes it is hot or raining, my personal appearance is always important. Interestingly, we do not have uniforms at my office, so what I am wearing is very important. I have also had to utilize skills such as teamwork. There are four of us that must work together to make sure the job gets completed correctly and on time. Some of the group dynamics I learned, I have used. For example, I contribute, but also take control if others are not. There are also times I have to handle money, so integrity and ethics that I have discussed previously, absolutely have come into play. I have had a few chances that I have to speak with our corporate office or other regional offices on the phone, so my verbal communication skills are something I have been able to practice. The company values like pride, teamwork, respect and customer driven have helped guide everything I do on the job. My next job will be in a more communication related field, but some basic management, performance and teamwork skills I have learned will continue to be valuable tools.   
 This assignment really made me reflect on my whole college career and looking back I can’t believe that I have learned so much in so many different classes. The Communication Department at WVU has proved to me that communication is not something that is common sense and that there is really so much to learn about it. When I look back and review all the classes I took both in Communication and my electives all of it will be very applicable to both my life skills and my professional skills in the future. I have learned about how important impressions, integrity, ethics, teamwork and confidence are. The art of communication is much more than the written or verbal words and expressions as it is about behavioral issues. We consistently communicate to the world through how we behave. My work at Avis and my volunteer work at the St. John’s University Parish taught me how to work in small groups and how to work independently and be successful at doing so. I have acquired so much new knowledge and information that I can now bring into the workforce.