

**SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**School of University Studies**  
**Course Approval Document (CAD)**

**Department:** Social Work

**Course No.** IU308

**Title:** Effective Interpersonal Communication\*

**New:** Fall 2010

\*Previously listed as "IU308 Compassionate Communication" under temporary course approval.

### **I. Catalog Description and Credit Hours**

A. (20 words). Effective oral communication skills to express honestly, listen with better understanding, and solve conflicts; also called Nonviolent Communication (NVC). (3)

B. (More extensive). Effective oral communication skills based on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) created by Marshal B. Rosenberg. NVC embodies effective skills for expressing yourself to gain what you want without alienating others. Additional skills support enhanced understanding of yourself (self-empathy) and others (empathy). Skills are unified by a four-step model: observation, feeling, need, and request. NVC is used worldwide to help people solve conflicts peacefully.

### **II. Interdisciplinary Nature of the Course**

Effective oral communication is integral to any profession, such as social work, science, technology, and business. Over the course of the semester, students will learn specific techniques of oral communication based on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as presented by the Center for Nonviolent Communication and Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg. Communication skills taught in this course are applicable at any level of practice, such as interpersonal, groups, or organizations. Students learn how to apply techniques in both their personal and professional lives.

The emphasis in the course is on the interface of the category of Oral Expression (how does one communicate) and the category of Social Systems (how does one's communication function in one's social environment).

The course structure emphasizes that communication skills are essential to get one's needs met. However, in getting one's needs met, it is important to consider how one goes about this process. It is not just getting what you need from others, but why one wants others to act, that is important. Does one want another person to feel motivated to cooperate willingly or to comply with requests out of fear? In considering the answers to these questions, one must learn to discriminate in speaking in order to draw others towards him/herself, and to not drive others away.

The course will address the subtheme, "Integration of Knowledge: Living in an Interdependent Universe" as follows. We are dependent on others to meet many, if not most, of our needs. Students learn to consider the effects of their communication. How does skilled communication work, and what are the ramifications of unskilled communication? Students consider these questions and learn Nonviolent Communication (NVC) not just for the sake of knowledge, but for the purpose of integrating new skills into their daily personal and professional lives.

**III. Pre- or co-requisite:** None.

### **IV. Purposes or Objectives of Course**

Students will:

A. Examine interpersonal communication, focusing on principles and strategies of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as presented by the Center for Nonviolent Communication and Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg.

US Objectives 2, 3, 7, 9

B. Practice Nonviolent Communication (NVC) skills both in and outside the classroom.

US Objectives 3, 7

C. Develop self empathy and empathy for others within the framework of Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

US Objectives 3, 7

D. Analyze their own interpersonal communication and develop strategies utilizing Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to improve communication effectiveness in various settings.

US Objectives 3, 7, 9

E. Become aware of values and the ethical choices in their own interpersonal communication.

US Objectives 6, 7, 9

F. Locate relevant information and research using traditional and online sources for learning about Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and for teaching others.

US Objective 1, 2, 3, 6

## **V. Expectations of Students**

A. Students will complete a research paper and oral presentation on Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

B. Students will complete assigned readings and all other assignments before class and regularly come to class prepared for discussion. Participation and practice of communication skills is essential for success in the course.

C. Students will complete exams (one hour mid-term exam and a final exam) at the time they are given in class.

D. Students will keep a journal of their practice of NVC outside of class and their thoughts on journal articles, discuss practice with other students on Forum, and complete other assignments such as viewing relevant film clips.

## **VI. Course Content and Outline**

This course explores the approach to communication which emphasizes compassion as the motivation rather than fear, guilt, shame, blame, coercion, threat, or justification for punishment. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is not about getting people to do what we want. It is about creating a quality of connection that gets everyone's needs met through compassionate giving. The process of NVC encourages us to focus on what we and others are observing separate from our interpretations and judgments, to connect our thoughts and feelings to underlying human needs/values (e.g. protection, support, respect), and to be clear about what we would like to meet those needs.

Topics (totally 45 hours):

1. Introduction to Nonviolent Communication (6 hours)  
Objective 1, 2, 3, 7

Research on Nonviolent Communication is presented. Rosenberg's two questions are discussed: "What happens to disconnect us from our compassionate nature, leading us to behave violently

and exploitatively? What allows some people to stay connected to their compassionate nature even under the most trying circumstances?"

2. Communication that Blocks Compassion (3 hours)  
Objective 3, 7

Several forms of "life-alienating" communication lead us to speak and behave in ways that injure ourselves and others. Examples of this form of communication are discussed. An example is the use of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness on the part of others who do not act in accord with our values.

3. Observing without Evaluating (3 hours)  
Objective 3, 7

The first component of the 4 step model of Nonviolent Communication separates observation from evaluation. When we combine observation with evaluation, others are likely to hear criticism and resist what we are saying. Instruction is given on stating observations that are free from judgments.

4. Identifying and Expressing Feelings (3 hours)  
Objective 3, 7

The second component of the 4 step model of Nonviolent Communication is feelings. In this unit, students begin to develop a vocabulary of feelings that promotes their ability to identify emotions and thereby more easily connect with others.

5. Taking Responsibility for our Feelings (3 hours)  
Objective 3, 7, 9

The third component of the 4 step model of Nonviolent Communication is recognition of the needs behind our feelings. If we have a positive feeling, it is likely that a need of ours is being met. If we have a negative feeling, it is likely a need is not being met. Students explore the connection between feelings and needs, and consider how to respond positively when someone is giving them a negative message.

6. Requesting that Which Would Enrich Life (3 hours)  
Objective 3, 7, 9

The fourth component of the 4 step model of Nonviolent Communication involves what we would like to request of each other to enrich each of our lives. When we speak, the clearer we are about what we want back, the more likely we are to get it. Students explore the problems with vague and abstract phrasing, and learn to make requests using positive action language.

7. Receiving Empathically (6 hours)  
Objective 3, 6, 7

Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. Instead of offering empathy, we often have a strong urge to offer advice, reassure, or talk about our own feelings and experiences. Students learn to reflect back what they have heard, allowing others to fully express themselves.

8. The Power of Empathy (6 hours)  
Objective 3, 7

Our ability to offer empathy can diffuse conflict and potentially violent situations. Students practice empathy in their relationships and begin to experience more ease in their relationships.

9. Connecting Compassionately with Ourselves (6 hours)

Objective 3, 6, 7

One crucial application of Nonviolent Communication is self empathy. By practicing self compassion, students learn to act in service of their values and needs, and are prepared to help others do the same.

10. Expressing Anger Appropriately (3 hours)

Objective 3, 7

Blaming and punishing are superficial expressions of anger. Students learn that their anger is a sign of their own unmet needs. Instead of blaming others, students learn to explain their needs and take responsibility for making their lives more wonderful.

11. The Protective Use of Force (1.5 hours)

Objective 7, 9

The protective use of force is differentiated from the punitive use of force. In situations where there is no opportunity for communication and there is imminent danger, we may need to use the protective use of force. The intention is to prevent injury or injustice.

12. Expressing Appreciation in Nonviolent Communication (1.5 hours)

Objective 3, 7

Nonviolent Communication encourages the expression of appreciation via stating the action that has contributed to our well-being, the need that was fulfilled, and the positive feeling that has resulted.

### **VII. Textbook and /or Other Required Materials:**

Leu, L. (2003). *Nonviolent communication companion workbook: A practical guide for individual, group or classroom study*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Rosenberg, M.B. (2003). *Nonviolent communication: A Language of life* (2nd ed.). Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Rosenberg, M.B. (2005). *Speak peace in a world of conflict: What you say next will change your world*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

### **VIII. Basis for student evaluation:**

The weight of evaluation criteria may vary at the discretion of the instructor and will be indicated at the beginning of each semester. The approximate breakdown is as follows:

A. Paper and oral presentation = 25%

Students complete a paper reviewing research on Nonviolent Communication (NVC). Students complete a presentation on their research and an application of NVC relative to their profession.

B. Preparation and Participation = 25%

Students complete homework and participate in class discussion based on assignments.

C. Tests (midterm and final) = 25%

The midterm (using both objective and short essay questions) requires students to demonstrate mastery of basic concepts in NVC and the four step model, as well as beginning understanding of NVC applications. The final test (using only essay responses) requires students to demonstrate a more advanced integration of concepts and applications.

D. Journal, Forum, and other assignments = 25%

Students keep a journal of their daily or weekly personal experiences of applying NVC, as well as notes on their thoughts on journal articles. Students discuss applications of NVC with other students on Forum. Students view film clips on NVC.

## **IX. Justification for inclusion in the University Studies Program**

**General Conduct of the Course:** This is a hands-on course where students actively engage in practice and analysis of new skills. Students are exposed to a skill through reading, watching films, and in-class lecture and role plays. Students practice the skills in class. After students individually complete written assignments, they participate in class discussions in both small and large group work. Written assignments contain students' responses to questions about the concepts in the readings, and documentation about their practice of skills outside of class. In discussions, the instructor provides guidance for students' further understanding of skills.

### **Objective 1: Demonstrate the ability to locate and gather information.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

There is a significant amount of information about Nonviolent Communication. Online and traditional materials are resources for students' classroom activities and as well as for students' future use in their chosen professions. Various types of information (books, articles, online videos) will be accessed by both the instructor and the students throughout the course. Locating information is important now and in the future, since many students chose to teach effective communication skills to others.

#### Teaching Strategies

Instructor will provide guidance for accessing and utilizing major online and traditional resources. Students will become familiar with resources and learn to access information and films. Explanation will be given to help students evaluate the quality of information and presentations on the internet.

Researching traditional and online materials, students will have the chance to choose an area of interest and analyze how their findings are of value to themselves and others. In particular, students learn about applications for Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in their specific personal and professional settings. Instructor provides feedback in this process of learning applications. To further strengthen the theme of locating information, students are required to locate research on other communication strategies, and compare the success of using each approach to the NVC approach.

#### Student Assignments

A. Paper. The purpose of this paper is for the student to discover articles and books on Nonviolent Communication and relate it to his or her personal and professional life. Key points that students address are as follows: 1. A summary of the subject. 2. What are the most important findings or what did you learn? 3. In what ways does this relate to your life? 4. Using critical thinking, can you think of some points that might have been overlooked, or you disagree with? 5. How did reading this change you, and what implications does this have for your future?

B. Students are required to select 4 non-NVC research articles during the semester. In their journal, students will cite the article, summarize the findings, and compare the findings to NVC articles they are reading.

## Evaluation of Student Performance

The instructor provides initial explanation to students on appropriate use of sources and databases, and selection of topics. Thus, students will proceed with assignments after preliminary instruction. To evaluate the assignments, scoring rubrics will be used to give feedback to students. Items included on the scoring rubric for the paper include demonstration of ability to: gather appropriate articles, cite articles, summarize findings, and write clearly. Items included on the scoring rubric for the assignment on non-NVC research articles are the same as for the paper, with two additional items included: demonstration of the ability to compare research findings and draw conclusions.

### **Objective 2: Demonstrate capabilities for critical thinking, reasoning, and analyzing.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

Throughout the course, the instructor presents Nonviolent Communication (NVC) skills and explains how skills may or may not be effective, thus modeling critical thinking. Students are asked to examine their communication successes and failures by homework exercises, as well as via journaling. Student journals and related class discussions offer opportunities for critical thinking. In addition, students will locate research on non-NVC communication strategies and compare findings.

#### Teaching Strategies

Every week, after the instructor presents a skill, students practice the skill and assess their own practice of the skill by writing in their journal. These journals are for noting their successes in applying Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and for finding out which areas of NVC usage are more helpful for their particular life situation. Finally, students discuss their progress in class. Students provide feedback to each other and demonstrate critical thinking. Instructor clarifies any points that are unclear and emphasizes the practice of critical thinking. Critical thinking will be additionally emphasized in the work in which students find articles on other communication strategies.

#### Student Assignments

As noted above, there is much information on Nonviolent Communication (NVC). Critical thinking is employed in the Paper, as described in the Assignments section of Objective 1 above. Critical thinking is best exemplified in the Paper in the step, "Using critical thinking, can you think of some points that might have been overlooked, or you disagree with?" Critical thinking in the paper is a stepping stone for student to do the Oral Presentation. In addition, students are prompted to display critical thinking in weekly discussions. Students are required to select 4 non-NVC research articles during the semester. In their journal, students will cite the article, summarize the findings, and compare findings to the NVC articles they are reading.

## Evaluation of Student Performance

All written work is collected and graded, usually once a week (every other class session). Instructor reviews homework and journals and evaluates student's reported application of skills and subsequent analysis employing critical thinking. Instructor provides written feedback. In the classroom, the instructor provides verbal feedback to the student to assist development of critical thinking. For the comparison of communication strategies (assignment on non-NVC research articles), students will be evaluated on the demonstration of the ability to compare research findings and draw conclusions.

### **Objective 3: Demonstrate effective communication skills.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

A. The course is centered on the presentation and practice of Nonviolent Communication skills:

1. Differentiating observation from evaluation, being able to carefully observe what is happening free of evaluation, and to specify behaviors and conditions affecting us;
2. Differentiating feeling from thinking, being able to identify and express internal feeling states in a way that does not imply judgment, criticism, or blame/punishment;
3. Connecting with universal human needs/values (e.g. trust, understanding) in us that are met or not met in relation to what is happening and how we are feeling; and
4. Requesting what we would like in a way that clearly and specifically states what we do want (rather than what we don't want), and that is truly a request, not a demand (i.e. attempting to motivate, however subtly, out of fear, guilt shame, obligation, etc. rather than out of willingness and compassionate giving.)

B. The course also requires an oral presentation. The student leaves this class with a professional presentation that they can duplicate in a setting of their choice.

### Teaching Strategies

A. The basic teaching strategy followed for each increment of content and skill set is as follows:

1. Students consider a new skill by reading the text, seeing a film, and/or live demonstration in class.
2. Students complete written work demonstrating their theoretical understanding of the content.
3. Students attempt to carry out the skill in their personal or work environment.
4. Students perform role plays in class.
5. Class discussion follows, in which students learn about each other's successes and failures, and the instructor makes appropriate comments clarifying the content and/or skills.

B. The instructor prepares students for the oral presentation by teaching the basic elements of an educational presentation.

### Student Assignments

Homework assignments require reading the text and writing responses to questions about the skills. When the class meets, students discuss their responses, comparing and contrasting ideas and information. The instructor answers questions and clarifies any misunderstandings. Student demonstration of the skills is required in class exercises and role plays. In the oral presentation, students share the highlights of their paper, and lead a Nonviolent Communication educational demonstration, similar to a session they might lead for an educational group or support group. The oral presentation requires the students to "teach" a skill.

### Evaluation of Student Performance

Students are evaluated on their mastery of the theory of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) via homework assignments and exams. Some students, based on their previous classes and experience, will learn the skills much faster than others. It is not possible to master all NVC skills in one semester. However, it is possible to have mastery of the basic applications. Students are evaluated through their class participation and demonstration of skills, and are expected to have a basic skill level. A grading rubric is used to assess the skill level. The oral presentation rubric is based on performance on three items: ability to present information, ability to lead a discussion, and ability to lead an activity (or teach a skill). Both instructor and peer evaluations will be employed on oral presentations.

**Objective 4: Demonstrate an understanding of human experiences and the ability to relate them to the present.**

Emphasis: NONE

**Objective 5: Demonstrate an understanding of various cultures and their interrelationships.**

Emphasis: NONE

**Objective 6: Demonstrate the ability to integrate the breadth and diversity of knowledge and experience.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

This course integrates content within a discipline in the following two ways. One, within the discipline of communication, there are hundreds of concepts and techniques. The Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model unifies and simplifies central concepts of communication. These simplified concepts translate into practical skills. Two, each student learns skills for their respective future profession via a unifying model for communication.

This course integrates disciplines. Throughout the course, students of various majors are learning to apply NVC, and having discussions of how NVC works for them. At the end of the course, students present one main application of NVC relative to their profession. Other students hear the various angles of application and discuss the content of each presentation, observing that NVC applies across all disciplines.

Students learn communication concepts must be integrated into their own life situation. They become aware of how their communication skills affect everything they do, personally and professionally. It is not possible to complete this course without examining how one's communication skills affect one's relationships and concomitant quality of life.

#### Teaching Strategies

The instructor highlights how the course integrates content within the discipline of communication. As well, the instructor highlights how the Nonviolent Communication concepts and skills can be applied in all disciplines.

The interdependence of people and the universality of human needs are highlighted. Nonviolent Communication involves communication skills that foster compassionate relating, as well as the consciousness of the interdependence of our well being and using power with others to work together to meet the needs of all concerned. The instructor presents examples throughout the course.

#### Student Assignments:

Throughout the course, students keep a journal of their applications of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). These journals are for noting their successes in applying NVC and for finding out which areas of NVC usage are more helpful for their particular life situation. In addition, there is a research component to the journal, in that students are required to compare NVC research to research on other communication strategies. The Paper and Oral Presentation also capture students' integration of NVC into their knowledge and skill base. Through discussion of assignments, as well as discussion in the presentation section of the course, students observe that NVC can be used in all fields.

#### Evaluation of Student Performance

All written work is collected and graded, usually once a week (every other class session), or at different intervals in the semester. Instructor reviews journals and evaluates student's reported application of skills and subsequent integration of knowledge. Instructor provides written feedback. For the comparison of

communication strategies (assignment on non-NVC research articles), students will be evaluated on the demonstration of the ability to compare research findings and draw conclusions.

The Paper and Oral Presentation, previously discussed, are also evaluated in terms of integration of knowledge. Examples of items evaluated include: "In what ways does this (article) relate to your life? Using critical thinking, can you think of some points that might have been overlooked, or you disagree with? How did reading this change you, and what implications does this have for your future?"

**Objective 7: Demonstrate the ability to make informed, intelligent value decisions.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

The theme of valuing others' needs, and at the same time, valuing one's own needs is central in this course. Instead of one person's needs getting met at the expense of another, students learn to value solutions where everyone's needs are met. Students learn through self-empathy to identify their own needs and evaluate how to meet those needs. At the same time, students practice assessing others' needs, which are often obscured by unpleasant messages or unskilled communication from others. Informed decision making can take place when students learn strategies to support everyone's needs getting met.

#### Teaching Strategies

The interdependence of people and the universality of human needs are highlighted. The instructor guides students to learn self-empathy so they can identify their own needs and evaluate how to meet those needs. In addition, instructor provides skills training on how to hear unpleasant messages or unskilled communication from others, and identify others' underlying needs. The theme of analyzing personal values and making decisions about communications is highlighted throughout the course through lecture, film, and discussions.

#### Student Assignments

Throughout the course, students complete homework exercises and keep a journal of their applications of Nonviolent Communication. These journals are for noting their successes in applying Nonviolent Communication and for finding out which areas of Nonviolent Communication usage are more helpful for their particular life situation. The subject of values is inherent in learning how to apply more effective communication. For example, students who take the course have already committed to learning skills that support the value of compassionate (not violent) communication. The Paper and Oral Presentation also capture students' ability to reflect on their values and make decisions about their communication strategies in their personal and professional lives.

#### Evaluation of Student Performance

All written work is collected and graded, usually once a week (every other class session), or at selected intervals in the semester. Instructor reviews journals and evaluates student's reported application of skills and subsequent awareness of values in communication. Instructor provides written feedback. The Paper and Oral Presentation, previously discussed, are also evaluated in terms of integration of values and decision making. The instructor provides both written and verbal feedback.

**Objective 8: Demonstrate the ability to make informed, sensitive aesthetic responses.**

Emphasis: NONE

**Objective 9: Demonstrate the ability to function responsibly in one's natural, social and political environment.**

Emphasis: SIGNIFICANT

#### Content

The key phrase here is “function responsibly.” Nonviolent Communication (NVC) rests on the premise that what you say next will change your world. NVC is not just a tool for individual growth. It is a tool for social action. In many different countries, NVC is being used to mediate conflicts and improve the larger community and society.

Being a responsible citizen requires discrimination in speaking. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) attunes the student to the tremendous power of speaking which can uplift or damage. There are three primary outcomes that students can expect to receive by learning NVC: (1) Enhanced skills for listening to what other people mean behind their words; (2) Enhanced ability to express desires to other people in ways that are more likely to be heard, thereby increasing the possibility that needs will be met in relationships; (3) Enhanced ability to stay emotionally present to one’s self so that one is better equipped to make sound decisions for life and relationships.

#### Teaching strategies

The basic teaching strategy followed for each increment of content and skill set has been previously explained (see Objective 3). Repetition of this strategy continues throughout the semester.

#### Student Assignments:

Throughout the course, students complete homework exercises and keep a journal of their applications of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). These journals are for noting their successes in applying Nonviolent Communication and for finding out which areas of NVC usage are more helpful for their particular life situation. The subject of functioning responsibly is inherent in learning how to apply more effective communication. For example, students who take the course have already committed to learning skills supporting their growth as a responsible member of society. The Paper and Oral Presentation also require students to reflect on their communication strategies and assess their level of responsible action in a family setting, a professional setting, or the larger community.

#### Evaluation of Student Performance

All written work is collected and graded, usually once a week (every other class session), or at selected intervals in the semester. Instructor reviews journals and evaluates student’s reported application of skills and subsequent assessment of functioning responsibly. Instructor provides written feedback. The Paper and Oral Presentation, previously discussed, are also evaluated in terms of how the student is demonstrating responsible functioning in the family, work, and community settings.

**X. Background:** The expertise to teach this course is assessed by the following considerations. First, a faculty member who teaches interviewing skills, or what is called “micro practice skills” in social work, would have the basic foundation to teach this course. In the social work department, currently, there are four out of eight faculty members who are teaching micro skills. Another two faculty members have recently taught micro skills. Thus, most social work faculty members have expertise in teaching micro skills. Secondly, a faculty member would need to have some training in Nonviolent Communication. The amount of this training would vary. From two to three workshops could be sufficient to get a more in-depth feel for the material. Faculty members with similar skills and background, such as in counseling or psychology, could consider preparing themselves to teach this course.

**XI. Class Size:** The optimum class size for this course is 25. Considerable group activity and discussion dictate a size no larger than this. In addition, the grading load generated by the many assignments makes maintaining this maximum important for effective and timely evaluation and return of assignments.