



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

**THE COMMUNICATION LAB
PEER FACILITATOR HANDBOOK**

Revised WINTER 2011 – Dawn White

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE COMMUNICATION LAB	3
Basic Course Philosophy	3
JOB DESCRIPTION	3
RESPONSIBILITIES	3
QUALIFICATIONS	4
Academic	4
Communication	4
Personal	4
LAB STUDENT ASSESSMENT	5
Lab Work	5
Student's Attendance.....	5
Student's Attitude	5
Final Assessment Form	5
LAB STUDENT JOURNALS	6
Purpose	6
Assessment	6
FILING SYSTEM	6
FACILITATOR LOG	7
FACILITATOR MEETING	7
PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS	8
PEER FACILITATOR ROOM	8
PROFESSIONALISM	9
Confidentiality	9
Conduct	10
Student/Facilitator Relationships	10
Dress	10
Promptness	11
Absenteeism	11
Lab Hours	11
Shutdown	11
Lab Use After Hours	11
Pay Schedule	12
A FINAL WORD	12

THE COMMUNICATION LAB

Basic Course Philosophy

Cape Breton University offers three introductory courses in Communication: *Introduction to Interpersonal Communication* (Communication 103), *Introduction to Public Communication* (Communication 105) and *Issues in Media Studies* (Communication 255). As defined in Back to Basics, a document written to provide a guide to teaching the introductory course, “We adhere to a philosophy or goal that seeks to promote in students not only a cognitive mastery of interpersonal and public communication, but an affective and behavioural one also.” Cognitive development refers to students’ theoretical understanding of the concepts covered in the course. Affective development focuses on students’ examination of the feelings they experience in these communication contexts; for example, how the students feel about their own communication behaviour. Finally, the behavioural area allows students to develop their interpersonal and public communication skills. All Peer Facilitators should read the Back to Basics document. Ask the Lab Coordinator for a copy.

Through the use of experiential learning, the communication lab curriculum is designed to help students reach their own cognitive, affective, and behavioural goals. The specific methodology includes video-taped communication exercises, role-playing activities, small group discussion, and journal writing. Peer Facilitators, play a vital role in this process.

JOB DESCRIPTION

The Communication Lab Peer Facilitators’ role is to facilitate and evaluate small groups of undergraduate students enrolled in Communication 103, 105 and 255.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This position involves facilitating regularly scheduled 50 minute Communication Labs consisting of five to seven students enrolled in one of the introductory Communication courses. Following weekly training, Peer Facilitators are expected to work from a prepared lesson plan in order to assist students as they develop their cognitive, affective, and behavioural communication skills. Peer Facilitators distribute two journals to students throughout the year and are responsible for assessing, responding to, and keeping records of these assignments. Peer Facilitators keep weekly logs which are regularly reviewed by the Lab Coordinator and Communication 323 Professor. A written assessment of each student’s progress will be completed and submitted to the Lab Coordinator at the end of each semester. Peer Facilitators are also responsible for creating and maintaining student files throughout the semester are required to attend weekly training meetings with the Lab Coordinator.

QUALIFICATIONS

Academic Qualifications

To qualify as Peer Facilitators, students must have successfully completed two of: Communication 103, 105, 255, 6 additional credits in Communication as well as Communication 321. Further, students must be enrolled in Communication 323 (Facilitation Practicum) during their first semester as a Peer Facilitator. In *exceptional* cases, students who have excelled in the basic courses and at least one other upper level communication course and who have demonstrated facilitating potential may be permitted to enroll in Communication 321 and Communication 323 thus enabling them to facilitate labs. **Peer facilitators must have and maintain a 70% average in all courses while demonstrating excellence in all communication courses.**

Communication Qualifications

Communication Peer Facilitators should possess the following skills:

- ❖ positive interpersonal communication skills
- ❖ positive public communication skills
- ❖ group leadership and mediating skills
- ❖ the ability to build trust and credibility
- ❖ strong organizational skills
- ❖ good time management skills
- ❖ the ability to meet deadlines
- ❖ the ability and desire to assess students fairly
- ❖ an understanding of the small group dynamic
- ❖ good conflict management skills

Personal Qualifications

Communication Peer Facilitators should:

- ❖ be open to new ideas and concepts from students, co-workers, and faculty
- ❖ possess a strong interest in the discipline
- ❖ be able to respond to students and learning needs
- ❖ be non-judgmental
- ❖ possess patience to persevere
- ❖ be adaptable, flexible, reliable, and responsible
- ❖ be empathetic
- ❖ present a professional appearance and demeanor
- ❖ possess a good sense of humour
- ❖ possess a positive attitude

- ❖ respect the principals of professionalism
- ❖ respect for supervision
- ❖ be innovative, motivated, and self-directed

LAB STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Lab Work

Students' lab work is worth 10% of their final grade. Assessment is on-going, based on willingness and quality of participation, general attitude, and sensitivity towards others, ability to integrate theory with real life communication experiences, and personal growth and development. Facilitators play a key role in determining this grade.

Student Attendance

Lab students' attendance is essential. It is facilitators' responsibility to take attendance at the beginning of each lab session. Students arriving late must be recorded as such. Repeated lateness will affect their final grade. Assessment is done on a weekly basis and students not in attendance cannot be assessed. If a student misses labs regularly, notify the Lab Coordinator.

It is important that facilitators keep up-to-date with their lab's attendance. You will have your own form that you can take with you to lab to record attendance. Also, there is an attendance binder located in the facilitator room. After lab, facilitator's should take time to fill out their lab attendance in this binder. This attendance book must be left in the facilitator room at all times.

Student Attitude

Facilitators should be aware of students' willingness to participate, share experiences, and provide support and feedback to fellow students. Facilitators must also recognize student's ability to comprehend the purpose of the lab and to adopt new communication vocabulary. To monitor students' development, facilitators must keep a weekly facilitator's log (see page 7).

Final Assessment Form

Approaching the end of the semester, facilitators complete written assessments for each student. It is important that facilitators support their grade suggestion with ample comments. Thus, the assessment forms are time consuming to complete. It is recommended that facilitators begin assessments a couple of weeks before the end of lab classes. Assessments are usually due one week after the last lab class. Check with the lab coordinator for specific deadlines. Facilitators must adhere to these deadlines, as each assessment is reviewed by the Lab Coordinator in order to determine the official lab grade. **Failing to meet the set deadline will affect the Lab Coordinator's decision to rehire a facilitator.** After this deadline, facilitators meet individually with the Lab

Coordinator to review all student assessments.

LAB STUDENT JOURNALS

Purpose

During the semester, students complete two subjective question-and-answer journals. The journals provide students with an opportunity to evaluate what they are learning cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally. Communication lab journals are often based on lab activities and discussions. If students do not attend lab they will be unable to complete the journal and will be penalized accordingly.

Assessment

Journals are worth 10% of students' final grade. Distributed and explained in lab, students pass in their completed journals during the first class of the following week. Professors read each journal, make comments if necessary, and return them to the Lab Coordinator within two days. The Lab Coordinator reviews each journal and records a suggested grade out of 10 (**this grade is not placed on the journal as it is a *suggested grade only***). Finally, facilitators assess the journal. Facilitators are expected to comment on each answer so as to provide students with sufficient feedback. Although proper grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and appropriate use of communication terminology enhances the quality of the journal, keep in mind it is a subjective expression of thought and comments should respond to what students are sharing. Facilitators will learn more about effective written feedback in the training workshop. Instead of providing numerical grades, facilitators complete a Journal Assessment Guide after reading each journal (refer to back). To ensure confidentiality, journals must not leave the lab unless a facilitator is assessing them. Preferably, journal assessment should take place in the lab. Journals must be evaluated and given to students to view two weeks after being submitted. Facilitators then collect all journals and file them so the professor and the Lab Coordinator can examine the students' journals and assessment guides. The Lab Coordinator will meet with facilitators individually at the end of term to decide the final journal grades based on her and the facilitators' assessments of the journal.

FILING SYSTEM

With over 300 students per semester it is necessary to have an effective filing system for journals and assessments. During the first or second lab each semester, facilitators assign lab numbers to each student (listed in the attendance book located in the facilitator room). Students must record their lab number on all journals submitted.

The filing cabinet located in CC266G next to the Peer Facilitator room contains a file drawer with files for each student. Facilitators must write the names of their students on

the files corresponding with the students' lab number. This task must be completed by the end of the second week of labs. After students view their completed journal, it must be filed immediately. The Journal Assessment Guide must be updated and kept in the students' files. Students, professors, facilitators, and the Lab Coordinator are the only ones who have viewing access to the files.

Students may also view their journals throughout the semester. Once assessed, the journals must not be taken out of the lab under any circumstance.

There is also a small filing cabinet in the facilitator room that contains a drawer with a file for each facilitator. They contain the facilitator logs, general correspondence, and any journals to be assessed. Files should be checked regularly.

FACILITATORS' LOGS

Facilitators are expected to keep weekly logs for each lab they facilitate. This log aids in the student assessment process. The entries need only be a few sentences about each lab session (for example, the effectiveness of the exercise and the degree and description of the students' participation in exercises and discussions). Logs are also used to record weekly attendance. All log entries should be typed and kept in a binder. Communication 323 students will be required to include additional reflective responses in their logs. This will be discussed in class. See back of the handbook to view a copy of the log form used to write logs.

Facilitators are expected to submit their logs every two weeks throughout the term. The Lab Coordinator will collect the logs, read each one, and in certain circumstances, make comments. They will then be returned to the facilitators' files for the following week. As well as assisting in the student assessment process, logs are also considered crucial elements in the on-going training and assessment of Peer Facilitators. Failing to submit logs each week is not acceptable. It is very important to keep up-to-date with writing and submitting logs. At the end of each semester the logs are submitted along with the students' final assessment.

There are many purposes for the logs. Three of the purposes are:

1. Enriches your own learning experiences by allowing you to critically reflect on the experience.
2. Demonstrates your ability to engage in effective critical self-reflection as a means of personal and professional growth and development.
3. Provides the Lab Coordinator with a detailed sense of what is happening in your sessions and how students are developing. The Lab Coordinator relies greatly on your logs in order to determine grades for Communication 103 and 105 students.

FACILITATORS' MEETING

Facilitators must meet regularly with the Lab Coordinator. The purpose of these meetings

is to review upcoming lesson plans and to discuss the effectiveness of the current week's lesson. Other lab business is brought up at this time. The meetings are considered part of your on-going training. Failure to attend meetings can lead to misunderstood lesson plans and new business being missed. Attendance in the meetings is crucial to the success of the lab. Facilitators who have legitimate excuses are expected to contact the Lab Coordinator prior to the meeting time and schedule an appointment to review the upcoming lesson plans. Studying for a test or attending other meetings are not legitimate excuses for missing the weekly meeting. Repeated absenteeism impedes the facilitator's work in the lab and will result in a review of the facilitator's ability to conduct labs in the future.

The time of the facilitators' meeting will be determined during the beginning of the semester.

LESSON PLANS

Each week, the facilitators will be emailed the 103, 105 and 255 lesson plans for the following week. Copies of the lesson plans will also be available in the facilitator room. If you borrow the facilitator room copies of the lesson plans, please return them after your lab. The lesson plans will be discussed and explained during the weekly facilitator meeting. At the facilitator meeting, new facilitators are encouraged to share ideas, insights and thoughts with returning facilitators. Each lesson plan will set-forth a specific goal, but it is up to the facilitator to decide how to reach the goal depending on his/her style and the group's needs. Facilitators do not need to follow the lesson plan word-for-word, but it is important to cover the information required for that week. You are encouraged to research and come up with new activities and ideas for you lab, but you should run these by the Lab Coordinator before you use them. Please pay close attention to when you are required to use the video camera in your labs, as it is a very important learning tool. The video camera is used to record students during activities and speeches and it helps them become aware of their own progress.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS

Approximately halfway through each semester the Lab Coordinator will conduct a performance appraisal interview with each Peer Facilitator. The performance appraisal serves a number of purposes: (1) It gives facilitators an opportunity to discuss, in confidence, their successes as well as any difficulties they may be having; (2) The Lab Coordinator can outline any issues that need to be addressed; (3) The interview gives the Lab Coordinator a chance to listen to suggestions and ideas that facilitators may have; (4) The coordinator learns more about the students enrolled in the basic courses which is beneficial when preparing final grades; and (5) The performance appraisal helps to foster an interpersonal relationship between each facilitator and the Lab Coordinator. These interviews make up 10% of the Communication 323: Facilitation Practicum grade.

A schedule will be posted and facilitators may choose a convenient time for the interview.

It is recommended that facilitators bring their logs to the interview.

PEER FACILITATOR ROOM

The peer facilitator room has been set aside as a place for Peer Facilitators to work on **lab related activities**. In order to avoid congestion in this small space, facilitators are asked to avoid leaving bags, books, and coats for long periods of time on the floor and table. It is the facilitators' responsibility to keep the room tidy, so put coffee cups in the garbage, return food trays to the cafeteria and recycle what you can. The fridge may be used to keep food in, but please be sure to monitor what you keep in it and dispose of any expired food. The lab and offices are close by so keep noise to a minimum at all times. Please use personal laptops for lab or course related activities; the use of music, videogames and movies is not appropriate for the room. Because there can be so many facilitators working in a small room, it is not appropriate for facilitators to bring other friends into the room. If facilitators are grading students' work, confidentiality could be threatened if anyone other than facilitators or faculty are present. Keep the door closed if a number of facilitators are working on lab related activities. Please be courteous and use professional discretion. The whiteboard is intended to be used for serious messages only. This is a professional office and facilitators are expected to demonstrate professional conduct in the space at all times. Please adhere to the following Facilitator Room Guidelines:

FACILITATOR ROOM RULES

- ❖ This room is designated for Communication Peer Facilitators/faculty/staff **ONLY**.
- ❖ Be mindful of food based and environmental allergies and sensitivities.
- ❖ Be aware of the level of noise generated in the room.
- ❖ Be respectful of students and staff in adjoining classrooms, offices and labs.
- ❖ Keep the door closed as much as possible.
- ❖ Be respectful of facilitators completing work.
- ❖ Monitor your own food; throw out anything that has expired.
- ❖ Wash your dishes and put them away.
- ❖ Avoid any workplace politics and/or gossip about students or faculty.
- ❖ Avoid using videogames, loud music or movies in the room.
- ❖ The whiteboard is to be used for serious and/or lab messages only.
- ❖ Clean up after yourself; throw out garbage or recycle accordingly.
- ❖ Put back lesson plans, books, keys, etc. after borrowing them.
- ❖ Be mindful of your surroundings if you choose to have a discussion about your lab.
- ❖ Keep the room tidy; make sure books, backpacks etc. are out of the way.
- ❖ Keep the filing system neat and the doorway to the files clear.
- ❖ This room is a privilege, be respectful and keep it clean.

PROFESSIONALISM

Communication Lab peer facilitators are either employed by Cape Breton University or are

representing the University and the Department as Communication 323 students. As such, professionalism is essential and expected.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in the lab. Much of the students' work involves self-disclosure in that they share personal experiences in their journals with the understanding that only their facilitator, the Lab Coordinator, and their professor will read their work. For this reason, facilitators must not discuss journals with anyone other than the Lab Coordinator. It is preferable that journals are assessed in the lab. In the rare case where facilitators must take them home, they must be returned to the lab the following day.

Information students disclose during the lab sessions must also remain confidential. Students must be able to trust that their experiences are not discussed by facilitators outside of the lab. **Such conduct is considered means for dismissal.** Also, videotaped lab exercises must not be shown to other lab groups or facilitators. Respect students' privacy.

Conduct

While facilitating labs, facilitators set the interactional tone. Please be aware of the difference between teaching and facilitating. As a facilitator, you are not a teacher or a "student professor"; you are a **peer**. In lab, leave the majority of the discussion to students; you should be guiding the discussion and letting the students do the talking and learning. If you do not know the answer to a question a lab student poses, it is okay. You are a student who is learning, too, and should not expect to know everything. The facilitator's role is to be credible and trustworthy resource people. They are expected to choose appropriate language in the lab (for example, they should always use correct communication terminology and avoid slang as well as profane, sexist, racist, heterosexist language and humour). They must monitor social discussion. Facilitators must ensure all students demonstrate respect for everyone present in the labs. By exhibiting positive interpersonal communication skills facilitators will help to create a comfortable and safe lab environment.

Student/Facilitator Relationships

Facilitators dating their lab students is strongly discouraged. It is very important that students see their facilitators as people who are professional and trustworthy. This relationship is threatened when facilitators date their lab students. It could also lead to students second-guessing facilitators' assessments and take away the level of objectivity facilitators must use. Know the difference between being friendly vs. being a friend. We try to avoid putting lab students in labs with facilitators that they know already, but sometimes this cannot be prevented. You must take caution with instances where you know students in the lab. Avoid letting this interfere with the group (i.e. professionalism, level of seriousness in lab, and excluding other members of the lab).

Also, it is quite possible that you may run into your lab members outside of lab; this is a difficult situation, but please try to maintain professionalism and be aware of your actions.

Dress

Facilitators should dress appropriately when facilitating labs. Ball caps, sweat pants, or low cut shirts for example, are not professional and could affect facilitators' credibility. Thus, they should not be worn. You are a Peer Facilitator and should dress as such; rushing in from the gym and looking disheveled, for instance, is not acceptable. Try to appear neat, clean-cut, and professional. Always use common sense and discretion. Remember, you are representing not only the Department, but the University as well.

Promptness

Facilitators should arrive in the lab at least 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the session. At the start of lab time, they should be seated in the lab prepared to begin. Those who disregard the schedule lose credibility with students and become less effective Peer Facilitators. Facilitators must notify the Lab Coordinator immediately if they are going to be late. If she is unavailable, it is the facilitator's responsibility to get in touch with someone in the Communication Department (faculty or student) who can pass the message on to their lab group. Rushing in, arriving late, not having required materials prepared and appearing unprepared are all unacceptable. Repeated tardiness will not be tolerated.

Absenteeism

Facilitators are expected to be present each week to conduct the lab. In the event of unavoidable absences, it is the facilitator's responsibility to arrange for another facilitator to conduct the lab session. The Lab Coordinator can assist you with finding a replacement, but she may not be available at all times. You will be provided with each of the facilitator's contact information (e-mail addresses and phone numbers) so that you may be able to get in touch with them if you need a replacement. Facilitators should not miss more than one lab. The group dynamic changes when a different person conducts the lab and students may feel uncomfortable with different facilitators. **Repeated absences will result in the facilitator's position being terminated before the end of the semester.**

Lab Hours

During Fall and Winter semesters, the lab is open most week days from 8:40 A.M. until 6:30 P.M. (times may vary depending on lab schedules which are posted at the beginning of each semester). Lab hours vary during Spring and Summer semesters. Check with the Lab Coordinator for specific hours. If you would like to book the lab space, please consult with the Lab Coordinator.

Shutdown

After the final lab of the day, the facilitator is required to shut down the lab. This involves shutting off equipment, turning off the lights, and locking the doors. The Lab Coordinator will consult with facilitators to develop a lock-up procedure.

Lab Use After Hours

As soon as the final lab of the day is over the lab must be shut down. Facilitators are not permitted to be in the lab after hours or on weekends. The Commissionaires have been instructed not open the lab after hours under any circumstances. If something is forgotten in the lab, ask a Commissionaire to open the door in order to retrieve the item. The commissionaire will then lock the door immediately. If you would like to use the lab for a project or group meeting, please book the space with the Lab Coordinator.

Pay

Peer Facilitators who have completed the Communication 321 and Communication 323 and return to work in the lab will be paid as a university employee. All Cape Breton University employees are paid on a bi-weekly basis. Peer facilitators should check with the Lab Coordinator at the beginning of the semester to discuss the pay schedule. She will require each facilitator's full name, address, telephone number, and social insurance number, and CBU employee number (if assigned) for payroll purposes. Any discrepancies regarding pay should be brought to the attention of the Lab Coordinator immediately so they can be investigated. T-4 slips and Records of Employment are issued through the payroll office. Please direct any questions regarding these items to the payroll officer. The Lab Coordinator will be able to help facilitators get in touch with the payroll office. Direct deposit slips and/or checks will be placed in the facilitators' files on Thursdays of each pay week.

A FINAL WORD

Peer Facilitators are instrumental in helping students develop their communication skills. However, the personal rewards are immense. Being a Peer Facilitator gives one an opportunity to strengthen communication skills with faculty, colleagues, and students alike. Friendships and memories made in the lab can last a lifetime. Welcome Aboard!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY'S
EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING COMMUNICATION LABORATORY CONTACT:

DR. M. TANYA BRANN BARRETT
COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY
1250 GRAND LAKE ROAD
P.O. BOX 5300, SYDNEY, NS B1P 6L2
TEL: (902) 563-1322 E-MAIL: tanya_barrett@cbu.ca

OR

DAWN WHITE
CHAIR, COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
COMMUNICATION LAB COORDINATOR
CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY
1250 GRAND LAKE ROAD
P.O. BOX 5300, SYDNEY, NS B1P 6L2
TEL: (902) 563-1627 E-MAIL: dawn_white@cbu.ca

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:
<http://faculty.cbu.ca/communication>

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER:
@commlabs