

COM 128: FACILITATING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION
FALL 2025

Professor: Deborah Dunn, Ph.D.
Email: dunn@westmont.edu
Office Hours: M 9:15-10:20; W 1:00-4:00

Office: Deane Hall 101
Phone: (805) 565-6780

Required Texts

- Kaner, *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (3rd ed.)
- Course Readings on Canvas

Texts for Seminar Briefing

- Daniel S. Brown, Jr., *A Communication Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue*
- Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized*
- Ileana Marin (editor), *Collective Decision Making Around the World*
- Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*
- Umbreit & Armour, *Restorative Justice Dialogue*

Course Description & Outcomes

This course will address fundamental processes and ethical implications of facilitating communication, dialogue, decision-making, and how best to involve others in productive conversations on topics that matter. Students will learn how to help individuals and groups identify what they hold valuable, how to adapt facilitation techniques to meet the needs in group deliberation and dialogue, and gain skills and practice in active listening, appreciative inquiry, issue framing, and the art of hospitality.

This course satisfies the **graduation requirement for Serving Society**. Serving society courses provide a practical context in which to test, refine and flesh out classroom learning. As such, this course provides you with opportunities to engage communities in and beyond Westmont as you facilitate conversations, decisions, dialogues, and deliberations. Most community dialogues will take place weeknight evenings or on weekend mornings. If your schedule will not allow for this, then this is not the semester to take this class.

As this course fulfills the GE for Serving Society, there is a substantial community participation requirement, or "fieldwork." Such fieldwork consists of facilitating dialogues, moderating or notetaking for a community deliberation, and recording rich and detailed field notes of your subjects. *Serving Society GE credit requires that you perform at least 12 hours of service via deliberation and community-based research – so these activities are essential for completing/passing the course.* The *community conversations* are the heart of the work of this course—you must mark these dates off on your calendar and be prepared to spend several hours preparing for our conversations, facilitating the conversations, and then reflecting on and reporting the conversations.

Students learn how to:

Create effective and appropriate written and oral messages. Why this matters: Effective facilitators **speak and write with clarity**, so communities and groups can move from confusion or hostility to understanding and action. Effective facilitators also listen well and are attuned to the purpose, the occasion, and the needs of the participants. These skills are honed and demonstrated through: in-class discussion, facilitation exercises, note-taking, chart-writing, oral presentations, and writing assignments. You will also assess each other after group projects.

Engage diverse perspectives and acknowledge tensions and trade-offs in decision-making. Demonstrated through: facilitation, reflections, presentations, and exams. **Why this matters:** Dialogue isn't just about talking — it's about **hearing difference** and learning how to grapple with competing goods.

Commented [DD1]: I will add the appropriate language re GE Oral Communication, to the syllabus beginning Fall 2026. All students are already graded and given feedback on facilitation, oral presentations, group discussion, and communicating in teams and groups. Nearly all readings touch on ethical communication (from listening well, to honoring the face of the other to how to create communication environments that honor dissent and disagreement), practical lessons on how to get conversants through the "groan zone" and to a satisfying and quality resolution, applied sessions in the community and on campus, and giving inspiring and dynamic presentations. The syllabus and prompts need some refining for 2026 to make explicit the feedback specified by the GE committee.

Commented [DD2]: Students See also attached assignment prompts.

Apply ethical and faith-based frameworks to communication → Because real facilitation requires moral courage, not just technique. Demonstrated through: class participation, essays, exams, and facilitation activities. Facilitation is not a neutral act. **Ethical commitments** and faith perspectives guide how we listen, frame issues, and invite others into conversation.

How You Earn Your Grades:

- Facilitation Sessions (Prep/Delivery/Field/Reports) 40%
- Reflective Essays & Analysis 15%
- Attendance/Active Role in Discussions 15%
- Exams & Quizzes 30%

Course Climate, Policies, and Expectations:

Course Climate and Expectations:

- Please treat all persons, both present and not present, with respect, both when you are speaking and when you should be listening. This includes being courteous even when you heartily disagree, and contributing to an atmosphere in which all feel free to speak and be taken seriously. *“... our social and intellectual growth needs freedom for exploration complemented by a commitment to good will and graciousness. Personal discipline is also required. For example, civility is basic to all types of community, while academic honesty and respect for education are fundamental to an instructional environment. Learning depends on truth-centered attitudes. It thrives in an atmosphere of discriminating openness to ideas, a condition that is characterized by a measure of modesty toward one's own views, the desire to affirm the true, and the courage to examine the unfamiliar. As convictions are expressed, one enters into the ‘great conversation’ of collegiate life, a task best approached with a willingness to confront and be confronted with sound thinking.”* (Westmont Community Life Statement)
- For all assignments, always list all of your references unless specifically instructed otherwise (APA)
- Make sure you've allowed notifications of announcements from Canvas.
- Bring paper and pens/pencils to class. Multiple studies show that taking notes by hand is more effective than typing them. Plus, sometimes there are activities that require paper.
- Mobile phones should be on silent and tucked away out of sight during class. Laptops are NOT allowed in class unless we are doing a special activity which requires one.
- Do not record a class discussion unless all are aware of the recording and have given their permission.
- Assignments are due at the **beginning** of class. A late assignment results in one lower grade for each day that it is late; incorrect and/or incomplete assignments are returned for correction and are counted late until they are turned in correctly. Exams may not be made up except in cases of extreme hardship. If your class or athletic team will be away from campus, make arrangements to take the exam **before** you leave campus. Final exams are subject to Westmont's final exam policies.
- Dress appropriately when you are facilitating. Look like you made an effort, be your best (yet comfortable!) self. At all facilitated events, all students should look at least somewhat professional and dress modestly. Presentations in class require professional attire. If you don't know what this means, please ask.
- If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, obtain notes, and get caught up. You can also come to office hours to discuss anything on which you need more clarity.

Academic Integrity:

The relationship between students and faculty at Westmont is one of our best features and is informed by our common commitment to living ethically in community. This relationship assumes and requires an atmosphere of mutual trust and collaboration. Accordingly, we are committed to the highest standards of

Commented [DD3]: Students facilitate conversations, greet guests, etc. I oversee at least one “big” event, but students also do other facilitated conversations and events. I am not always present for those, but they are rated by participants via exit surveys and by each other via formal evaluation sheets. I will tweak the evaluation sheets to include an assessment of their oral communication skills.

Commented [DD4]: This includes a group oral presentation

Commented [DD5]: I keep track of how students participate

ethical conduct and academic excellence. You violate the principle of academic integrity when:

- You cheat on an exam
- You copy a classmate's work or allow your classmate to copy your work
- You fail to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an idea, or a turn of phrase
- You submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors
- You seek or obtain help on any work that calls for independent work
- You use AI to do your work (see more below) or download or purchase work and present it as your own
- You falsify information, such as why you were absent

Dishonesty of any kind will result in loss of credit for the work involved and the filing of a report with the Provost's Office. You will also likely fail the course. See the College plagiarism policy: http://www.westmont.edu/_offices/provost/plagiarism/plagiarism_policy.html

More about *Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools*: Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT both offer opportunities and raise concerns. The concern in this case is when you use AI as a substitute for your own thinking and your own academic work. Westmont's *academic integrity policy* prohibits us from "present[ing] another's work as our own." Therefore, **students should NOT substitute AI-generated content or ideas for original academic work**. Westmont faculty members design assignments for students' incremental and active learning – these require that students engage the **process** – to react, to puzzle, to work through, to ponder, to sit with uncertainty – to do the work of critical thinking and message construction. Note: You might well do your own work, but then when you use an AI program to check your grammar or make stylistic suggestions you may fall into substituting AI-generated work for your own. It is also possible that running your work through an AI program (such as ChatGPT or Grammarly) will flag your work as being AI-generated. The Westmont academic integrity policy does not prohibit students from using AI editing tools unless the extent of usage meets the threshold for plagiarism. You must have a conversation with me before you engage AI in any of your own work.

Note: It is also the case that generative AI often is incorrect and gives misinformation (called hallucinations). Also, the quality of the prompt shapes the quality of the output. If you do the thinking required to shape a helpful prompt, and do the research required to make sure that your content is correct, up-to-date and free from hallucinations, then you may as well just do the work!

Finally, when you turn in work for this course in the expectation of receiving a grade, you affirm that this is work you have produced entirely by yourself (except where it is a group assignment, in which case you affirm that this work is entirely the intellectual product of your group members).

Reasonable Accommodations & Wellbeing:

Westmont is committed to ensuring equal access to academic courses and college programs. In keeping with this commitment under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008, individuals with diagnoses that impact major life activities are protected from discrimination and may be entitled to reasonable accommodations. Students who choose to disclose a disability are encouraged to contact the Accessibility Resource Office (ARO) as early as possible in the semester to discuss potential accommodations for this course. Email aro@westmont.edu or see <https://www.westmont.edu/accessibility-resources> for more information. Any student may request advice on being tested for a disability.

If you have special circumstances (such as an academic or athletic team schedule, family complications) that I should be aware of, please inform me before the second week. Arrangements to accommodate your need must be made well in advance of any exams or assignments.

Additionally, the Westmont Counseling Center is available to assist you with any mental and emotional

health needs. Information is available at http://www.westmont.edu/_offices/counseling/.

Writers' Corner is a creative space where student writers can find friendly “test readers” as they develop projects for professors, employers, and others. Tutors support peers as they mature into more skillful and confident writers. Located in Voskuyl Library 215. Clients with appointments get first priority; drop-ins are also welcome. Make an appointment using WOnline: <https://westmont.mywconline.com/>

Honor and Respect in the Classroom: Westmont’s Community Life Statement calls us to treat each other according to two commands from Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Further, our Diversity Matters document indicates that as we abide by these commandments, we learn to honor and respect one another. In this class, we will embody these commitments as we interact with one another and with the class material. If you experience or witness something that does not honor these commitments, please talk with the instructor as soon as possible. You may also find it helpful to access the College's policy on Bias, Harassment, and Discrimination.

Proposed Course Schedule (Subject to Change, With Notice)

Day	Date	Readings, Activities, and Assignments
T	9/2	First Day of Class - Expectations 📖 Read Syllabus Thoroughly DO: Interviews, Observations, Research on E-Bikes in Santa Barbara (GO to State Street to observe and interview; look at social media, like NextDoor or Edhat; find stories from the <i>Santa Barbara Independent</i> and <i>Noozhawk</i>)
TH	9/4	Read: 📖 Carcasson, <i>Imagining the Robust Deliberative City</i> (Public Agenda) DUE in Class: 🔗 Notes from observations, interviews, research, reading
T	9/9	Read: 📖 Stewart, Zediker, <i>Black – Relationships Among Philosophies of Dialogue</i> 📖 Arnett, on Emmanuel Levinas, <i>Priority of the Other</i>
TH	9/11	Read: 📖 Kaner – Chs. 3, 4, 5, 8
T	9/16	🗣️ Come to GLC @ 1:00 for Facilitated Discussion, part of the Incarnational Preaching Project, hosted by Gaede Institute (notes due within 24 hours)
TH	9/18	Read: 📖 Kramer – On Buber - Ch 1 (The Twofold World) & Ch. 4 (Who is the Real I?)
T	9/23	Read: 📖 Arnett, Ch. 2 (The Narrow Ridge) 📖 Makau & Marty – Ch. 7 (Understanding)
TH	9/25	Collecting Community Concerns / Input Team Assignments
T	9/30	📖 Read: Makau & Marty – Chs. 8-9 on Deliberative Framing; Deliberative Dialogue; and the website / summary of Kettering and NIFI models
TH	10/2	📅 Data Gathering Due
T	10/7	🔗 Exam #1
TH	10/9	Building an Issue Guide – Graded In-Class Assignment/Exercise
T	10/14	Fall Holiday
TH	10/16	Revising the Guide & Obtaining Feedback (outside of class) Read:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Kaner – xxii, Chs. 1, 13, 14 📖 Block – <i>Community: The Structure of Belonging</i> (pp. 87-116)
T	10/21	Practicing – Review Kaner – In-Class Quiz / Performance
TH	10/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🗣️ Evening Facilitation (reserve 5:15 to 9:30 in your calendar) 📄 (notes due within 24 hours)
T	10/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📄 Reflective Essay Due In-Class Discussion on Brainstorming & Kaner, Ch.
TH	10/30	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Appelbaum, <i>Losing the Democratic Habit</i> (<i>Atlantic</i>)
T	11/4	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 On Habermas (from <i>Dialogue Theories</i>) 📖 Kim & Kim, <i>Theorizing Dialogic Deliberation</i>
TH	11/6	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 World Café (see selected chapters & web page)
T	11/11	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Kaner, <i>Grounding Principles</i> (chs. 1-3)
TH	11/13	In-Class Work in Groups on Presentations
T	11/18	📄 Presentations Due in Class
TH	11/20	Listening & Questioning Redux Discuss difficult conversation assignment
T	11/25	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Uçok-Sayrak – Attending to “face of the other” in intercultural communication
T	11/27	Thanksgiving Holiday
TH	12/2	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Westoby & Dowling 📄 Report on Difficult Conversations
T	12/4	🗣️ Conversation Cafés Held (Dec 2 – Dec 7)
TH	12/9	📄 Conversation Café Reports Due
T	12/11	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morley, <i>Beyond Consensus: Salvaging a Sense of the Meeting</i> ▪ Arnett, <i>Search for Ethical Community</i>
TH	12/11	Last Class – Looking Back & Study Session
Fri	12/19	📄 Final Exam @ High Noon on Friday

Prompt on Canvas for the Oral Presentation

Interactive Seminar Briefing (Based on Chosen Book)

Deliver a dynamic, creative, interactive, useful, valuable, inspirational, and professional seminar on the book you've chosen from the list. Assume your audience is composed of people familiar with the basics of dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making, although not familiar with your particular text. Your package should be professional in all aspects, something you'd be happy to add to a portfolio.

First – Obtain & Read Your Chosen Book. All members should read the *entire* work thoroughly (don't just assign chapters or parts). As you read, **think** about what information and concepts will be most valuable for your audience, on two levels:

1. How does your book enhance, enliven, contradict, enrich, or affirm what we've learned already in this course? How does it relate to what you already know? and

2. What is the value of your book/perspective for human beings striving for meaningful and ethical communication and full, rich lives?

After you've read your book, meet with your group members and work together to craft an outline of the book and a seminar for the class. The outline should be detailed and thorough and cover each chapter. Although you will not have time to present to the class all of the information in every chapter, your outline should be complete.

As you prepare your outline of the book, decide which parts to cover in an oral presentation. Think carefully about your purpose, your audience, how much to present and how much to illustrate, how much to "tell" and how much to "show."

Be sure you plan for an interactive component. Involve the audience. Also plan to create something for your audience as a tangible reminder to take away from your seminar – you can be creative here — a workbook, a pledge card, a reminder, a poster they'd want to keep, a laptop sticker – whatever works with your topic, theme, content, and purpose.

On the due date, you will turn in one "package" of documents – including 1) your thorough, detailed outline of the book; and 2) a *guide* to your seminar (what is the main point/idea/theme, major points, slides, activities, hand-outs, etc.).

Plan to use the room (or another venue) to reinforce your theme and content. Think about sounds, lighting, props, images, and overall ambiance to fully set your tone.

Time: You have about 3 minutes to set up, you have 14 minutes for the presentation, and you have 3 minutes for Q&A. All members of the group should be involved in some way – but all may be involved differently. Go with your strengths and do what you are good at doing.

Required Elements:

- 14 Minute Oral Presentation on the Book (See above re two main goals)
- 3 Minute Q&A with Audience (you may need to prepare a starter question if this stalls)
- Appropriate Visual Aids / Props (no Death by PowerPoint)
- Some Tangible Engagement / Take-Home Item)
- Multiple Opportunities to Engage Audience Interactively (to avoid talking-heads)
- Complete Packet (see above)

Do feel free to use the multimedia capabilities we have available, but make sure you plan ahead, practice, and know how to get set up – you will have to go to plan b if your set-up takes too long or if technology is not cooperating. When you use visual aids (from maps to organizational charts to bullet points), be certain you follow basic public speaking rules regarding visual aids (talk to audience, not your screen, use large fonts, KISS). **Bring your own HDMI adapter for your computer.**

You will be graded as a group on the presentation and materials. You will also turn in an evaluation of fellow group members.

Remember what you learned in public speaking, including:

- Plan a great attention-getter (you do not need to introduce yourselves, and you should not start with, "so, our book was on...")
- Structure your presentation well. Make use of previews, summaries, and conclusions at the beginnings/ends – and give a fair amount of thought to transitions between points as well as between

speakers. End well (avoiding the awkward, “that’s it...”). What point do you need to “hit home” in that final minute?

- Minimize errors by practicing and knowing your material well. This is a well-prepared, **extemporaneous** exercise – not something that you read verbatim or deliver for the first time! Work on maintaining high energy throughout the presentation and discussion. Inspire us!
- If you **MUST** refer to notes, have them professionally available on a podium or in a portfolio. Do **NOT** get up there with your floppy bit of paper or your 3x5 cards – and then proceed to read to us! You should **KNOW** your material well enough that the notes are your back-up.
- Dress professionally (note: Professionally is not the same as “nice” or “up” – dress like you are going for a job interview in a formal office environment).
- Avoid using slang or colloquial expressions that are problematic (avoid “you guys” in formal presentations to mixed-sex audiences, avoid trailing off at the end of a sentence with “yeah...” or “so...”; minimize “um”).
- When referring to your book, use the name of the author (Ruth Haley Barton exhorts us to..., or Bonhoeffer emphasizes...). Avoid, “the book says...”
- Choose vivid images or diagrams that illustrate or reinforce a point; avoid overly wordy/text-heavy slides; don’t assume that a YouTube video is always the best attention-getter.
- All materials should be professional in appearance, aesthetically engaging/pleasing, and proofread multiple times.

Caveat: *The use of humor is fine, but is not your objective. Don’t let the “fun” override the message.*

Criteria	Pts
Invitational in Tone	7
Creatively and memorably invites audience in to presentation via activity, energy of speakers, and general enthusiasm for the topic	pts
Purpose Clearly Communicated	6
Compellingly and memorably communicates thesis, argument, claim, the point of the presentation	pts
Support for Purpose/Thesis	
Provides appropriate & credible support (evidence, presentational aids, analysis) that significantly supports the purpose/thesis and enhances credibility	7
Language	
Ethically and correctly uses vivid, compelling language appropriate to the topic, audience, occasion, and purpose; avoids trite phrases; uses gender inclusive language	6 pts
Vocal Delivery	
Appropriately uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, intensity, and volume to heighten interest and enhance the sense that speakers are polished and confident	5 pts
Physical Presence	5
Appropriately uses physical behaviors, dress, and gestures that support the thesis and verbal message	pts
Materials	
Materials are relevant, desirable, free of error, aesthetically pleasing (outlines, take-away item, visual aids)	7 pts
Interactivity	
Audience is involved in meaningful simulation or activity directly relevant to the topic; creative immersion of audience into the text/ seminar mood	7 pts