

Congregations and nonprofit organizations are made up of interlocking circles of small groups, each of which goes through its own life cycle. Leaders who can work effectively with group dynamics and processes can maintain focus on the larger organizational system while paying attention to the groups that make up the organization. This course will describe group life cycles, dynamics and processes, present models of effective group leadership, and offer case studies and analysis of how groups function. Students will practice group leadership skills with informal and formal task groups, committees, boards, and staff groups, and receive feedback designed to strengthen their skills.

Reading List

Hill, Robert L. (2003). The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time. Boston: Skinner. ISBN 1-55896-457-6

Hunter, Dale, Bailey, Anne, and Taylor, Bill (1995). Zen of Groups: A Handbook for People Meeting With a Purpose. Tucson, AZ: Fisher Books. ISBN 1-55561-100-1

Hunter, Dale, Bailey, Anne, and Taylor, Bill (1995). The Art of Facilitation: How to Create Group Synergy. Tucson, AZ: Fisher Books. ISBN 1-55561-101-X

PLEASE NOTE that students are welcome to submit discussion topics for consideration by the instructor, if none of the discussion options provides an acceptable focus. Once a topic is approved, all students may choose it as one of the posting options for a particular unit.

Unit 1

Reading: Zen of Groups, 1 - 103

Students will introduce themselves and post digital photos as we begin to create a learning community. They will examine models of how groups work, and assess tools for exploration, setting objectives, and managing priorities.

Unit 2

Reading: Zen of Groups, 104 - 193

Students will continue evaluating tools for developing trust, managing the work of a group, team-building, and managing conflict. They will practice using evaluation and assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of a group.

Unit 3

Reading: Art of Facilitation, 1 - 139

Students will explore the role of facilitation in group processes, and assess meeting design and evaluation. They will consider managing group processes in ways that honor diversities, identities, and cultural backgrounds.

Unit 4

Reading: Art of Facilitation, 140 - 235

Students will explore the facilitator's role in group processes such as checking out assumptions, managing multiple identities, sabotage, and clearing. They will also evaluate a program designed for training facilitators. They will look for opportunities to organize or facilitate a small group, practice contracting and covenanting, and request feedback on their group process skills.

Unit 5

Reading: Hill, xiii - 67

Students will assess the set-up and management of small group ministry, currently used in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, as well as other faith communities.

Unit 6

Reading: Hill, 69 - 112

Students will continue exploring the model of small group ministry, and discuss issues raised by the model and its implementation. They will discuss

the role of covenants in building right relationships, and explore resistance to the development and use of covenants.

Unit 7

Reading: Lecture notes

Students will present examples of small group processes that have gone well, as well as those that presented challenges. They will assess methods of assessing group processes, and offer perspectives on the ways in which group processes can strengthen or challenge organizational health.