PUBP 1142: Teams and Collaboration
"Groups, Teams and Discovery of Complex, Open-Ended Problems"

Fall 2026
Section W1 (E -Earlier): Tues/Thurs 12:30p-1:45p
Section W2 (L – Later): Tues/Thurs 2:00p-3:15p
Location: Brittain Rec Classroom

Instructors

Jeff Davis, PhD
Office: Britain Rec Office Suite AND Klaus 3314
Email: jeff.davis@ece.gatech.edu
Office Hours: 3:30p-4:30p Tues/Thurs or by appointment

1. Course Description

This is a course in Groups, Teams, and Complex Open-Ended Problem Discovery designed to give you exposure to essential theories and concepts for analyzing, understanding, and managing teams that work on complex problems suited to multidisciplinary approaches. The context of the course draws upon the literature of critical thinking, cognitive science, observation, listening, and research methods associated with working in teams to analyze complex problems. This course combines these elements in a context in which students apply their learning to broad societal challenges.

You can think of the course as project-based learning focused on how to identify and understand complex, open-ended problems. The course examines the components that comprise teams, highlights key factors that influence team effectiveness, develops skills in diagnosing opportunities and threats that teams face, enhances teamwork expertise, refines project management abilities, and builds fundamental experiences to help hone your unique approach to being both a team leader and a team member.

This course has three broad foci and follows an experiential learning pedagogy. This learning style may feel frustrating to some of you, but for many of the ideas and skills we want you to develop, our experience has been to give you tasks to accomplish with minimal scaffolding so that you can use your existing skills to complete the task as best you can. This approach will help you build knowledge-and-skill scaffolding that fits both you and your team.

This course examines the interpersonal processes and structural characteristics that influence the effectiveness of teams, individual interactions, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. In short, we will examine the question: *"What does it take to be a good teammate?"*

Second, this course seeks to understand the theory and processes of group and team behavior to inform how you can effectively lead teams. It will help you understand the general principles and processes of effective leadership so that you can lead in a wide variety of situations.

Third, this course is intended to allow you to practice the art of engaging with difficult problems in a team context. The deliberate use of effective team problem-solving methods will be explored against the backdrop of effective team behaviors and societal challenges.

2. Overall Structure of Course and Methods of Instruction

This course will rely heavily on active and experiential learning. This is not a course in which you will sit back passively and take notes. Our classroom is a learning community to which you will need to contribute. You will engage with classmates, facilitators, and external stakeholders; analyze, innovate, and iterate on difficult problems; and build and maintain an effective team.

Class meetings will focus on activities that facilitate understanding of key concepts and support progress toward deliverables, accompanied by lectures to introduce and reinforce theories and practices. Outside of class, you will be responsible for coordinating team efforts, completing project tasks that cannot be accomplished during class time, and keeping up with all readings and assignments.

3. Learning Objectives

Goals for this course are to help you:

1. Improve your analytical abilities in understanding the behavior of individuals and groups in organizations.
2. Apply tools for diagnosing and enhancing team effectiveness.
3. Increase your awareness of how successful team members lead and what separates them from their counterparts.
4. Gain experience in leadership situations, including dealing with conflict, time pressure, and different accountability systems.
5. Develop confidence as a leader, recognizing that leadership happens throughout organizations (not just at the top) and that long-term effectiveness depends on your ability to lead others.
6. Understand how to apply team and group skills to complex societal problems that intersect with policy and technology.
7. Apply bottom-up research methods to understand the complexity of some society's most pressing problems.
8. Engage with stakeholders to develop both a top-down and bottom-up understanding of a problem area.

9. Produce high-quality examples, demonstrations, and displays of team thinking.
10. Practice evaluating yourself and others and reflecting on feedback.

11. Required Text/Readings

There will be various suggested readings for this course. Readings that complement teamwork and problem-space development will be shared via Canvas or Microsoft Teams. Students are expected to be familiar with this material, as class discussions, class assignments, and project evaluations may reference it.

12. Methods of Assessment

Description	Weight	Due Date/Description
Team CheckPoint #1: People Network	25 points	TBA
Team CheckPoint #2: People + Knowledge Network	25 points	TBA
Team CheckPoint #3: Final Presentation	25 points	Average of Score from Instructor, TA's, Facilitators, and Coaches
Individual Accountability Points (You have all 25 points now. They are yours to lose!)	25 points	**Facilitator Responsibility** -1 : Tardy (>10 min late) -3 : Unexcused Absense from Class -1 : Not Completing Class Surveys **Team Coach Responsibility** -1 : Accountability Meeting Penalty -2 : Missing Group Meeting with Team Coach **Instructor Responsibility** -1 : Missing small assignments

Final grades will be assigned according:
A = [90, 100]; B = [75,90); C = [60,75); D = [40,60); F = [0,40)

Final Exam. There is no scheduled final exam. However, there is a final poster presentation in lieu of the exam.

13. Continuous Improvement v. Episodic Evaluation

Project-based learning is different from knowledge-based learning. While you will acquire new knowledge, the aim of the course is for you to learn in the context of accomplishing something that matters to you and, perhaps, to the larger world. Working on a team toward a project outcome requires a different set of skills and intentions.

You will receive feedback based on your ability to:

- Show up prepared and ready to participate.
- Engage in thoughtful study related to the objectives set by your team.
- Accomplish the tasks agreed upon by your team.
- Produce high-quality work.

14. General Words about Teamwork

The issue of equity is a concern that some students have about working in teams and about team peer feedback. *"If you work harder and do better work than your peers, why should your assessment be dependent on them?"* This view often comes from educational environments that primarily measure individual performance. In this class, however, your primary assignments will be team products. Team tasks should earn team rewards. This means that you must not only make a direct contribution to the group's products but also take responsibility for helping your team work effectively.

An occasional problem in group projects is a team member who does not do their fair share of the work. You are urged not to let problems develop to the point where they become serious. Beware of excuses like: *"I'm too busy right now, but I'll make it up later."* Be reasonable, but don't be a doormat. Everyone in this class is expected to carry an equal share of the teamwork load.

You are expected to get the work done and to hold one another accountable. Teams often ignore problems, wishing they would go away. More often, they don't—they only get worse. Try first to solve problems among yourselves. If you cannot, bring the issue to your coach, facilitators, or instructors. We will employ extensive peer and facilitator feedback in a developmental way to clarify how the team perceives its own functioning.

15. Classroom Ethos & Etiquette

The highest professional standards are expected of all members of the GC community.

The collective reputation of the class and the value of the undergraduate program experience depend on this commitment. Faculty are expected to be professional and prepared to deliver value in each class session. Students are expected to be professional in all respects.

16. Accommodations

Students with disabilities in need of accommodations are encouraged to contact of the Office of Disability Service as soon as possible to ensure accommodations are implemented promptly. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with the instructor.

17. Late Assignment Policy

Unless other arrangements have been made in advance, students are expected to submit their assignments when due.

18. Attendance/Engagement Policy

Attending class is vital to doing well in this course. Attendance is mandatory, and it will be taken at each class session. For each meeting, students will receive full credit for being on time and actively engaging in class.

Students may be excused from class and team meetings for illness, family emergencies, religious holidays, or other GT-approved absences. When possible, excused absences require notification to the instructor, facilitator, or coach at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting time and may require documentation from the Dean of Students office upon request.

In addition, students are allowed up to **two unexcused class absences**, **two unexcused tardies**, and **two unexcused team-meeting absences** without penalty.

If you are sick, you should stay home. If you are feeling slightly unwell but still able to attend class or join a meeting, we encourage you to wear a mask to reduce the risk of transmission.

19. Communication Policy

Messages sent to the instructor are encouraged but should not be considered a reliable means of instant communication for important matters. The sending of a message to the instructor, unless it receives a response, cannot be assumed to have reached the instructor. The instructor will respond to student messages to confirm that they have been received. If a student sends a message and does not receive a response within two days, the student should assume the message was not received and should either try another method of communication or wait until the next class to convey the message. In communications to the instructor, please indicate your class section and team number (if applicable).

The primary method of communication to students (from instructors, TAs, and facilitators) will be via MS Teams. Please check MS Teams daily and ensure that your notifications are enabled so that you are promptly made aware of communications.

20. Flexibility and Dynamically Adapted Class

The intent of the course content is to correspond to student progress on their projects and the various stages of team development. As such, the nature of class discussions, reflection assignments, and readings will be dynamically adapted to suit the needs of the classroom. However, I will endeavor to provide students with weekly updates on what we will be covering and what will be expected of them.