UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Communication Skills and Interpersonal Relation Management

2526-2-F7502Q027

Aims

Effective communication and interpersonal skills are essential in all professional contexts, and especially so in marine sciences, where interdisciplinary collaboration, fieldwork, stakeholder engagement, and international cooperation are common. This course aims to equip students with the communication and relational skills necessary to operate effectively in diverse and often challenging marine science environments. Emphasis is placed on understanding how to communicate in multicultural teams, manage conflict in high-stress situations (e.g. during expeditions or research campaigns), and lead or participate in collaborative scientific work.
By integrating theory and practice, this course promotes a healthy and productive working climate, whether onboard research vessels, in laboratories, or within international project consortia.

Learning outcomes according to Dublin Descriptors:

1. Knowledge and understanding
   Students will gain a solid understanding of interpersonal communication models and techniques, with specific attention to professional contexts in marine sciences. They will learn how to navigate group dynamics, manage conflicts in research teams, and conduct effective negotiation—skills crucial during fieldwork, inter-agency collaboration, or stakeholder engagement.
2. Applied knowledge and understanding
   Students will be able to apply communication and conflict management strategies in realistic marine science scenarios, such as international marine expeditions, collaborative research projects, or science-policy dialogues.
3. Making judgements
   Students will learn to assess critical communication situations in multicultural and multidisciplinary teams, recognizing when and how to intervene to improve team functioning and project outcomes.
4. Communication skills
   Students will enhance their ability to clearly communicate complex scientific ideas to peers, stakeholders, policymakers, and the general public, adapting their style to different audiences.
5. Learning skills
   Students will reflect on their communication styles, identify areas for growth, and develop personal

strategies to improve effectiveness in high-stakes, intercultural, and team-based scientific contexts

Contents

This course integrates theoretical foundations with case-based and experiential learning focused on communication in marine science contexts. Students will reflect on their personal communication styles and learn to manage challenging conversations effectively.

Detailed program

1. Group and Teamwork in Marine Science
   • Group structure and dynamics in research teams (e.g., fieldwork crews, interdisciplinary labs)
   • Sociograms and analysis of team roles during marine projects
   • Group interaction under stress (e.g., during sea campaigns, remote expeditions)
   • Stages of teamwork in scientific projects and collaborative research initiatives
2. Leadership in the Field and in Research
   • Situational leadership in marine contexts (e.g., adapting leadership styles on vessels, during crises)
   • Building trust and accountability in multicultural scientific teams
3. Emotion Regulation in High-Stress Environments
   • Emotion management during high-pressure scenarios (e.g., equipment failure, field emergencies)
   • DBT and mindfulness techniques adapted for expedition settings
4. Communication Theory
   • Core elements of scientific communication
   • Watzlawick's axioms and Grice's maxims in interprofessional scientific dialogue
   • Applying these principles when reporting to supervisors, peers, or external agencies
5. Practical Communication Strategies
   • Effective communication during research presentations, report writing, and stakeholder engagement
   • Communication in hierarchical structures (e.g., university labs, governmental bodies, NGOs)
6. Feedback Mechanisms in Research and Field Teams
   • Delivering constructive feedback in team debriefings or during mentorship
   • Creating a positive feedback culture in research institutions and field stations
   • Models: Johari Window, MACRO YES model
7. Conflict Management in Marine Contexts
   • Tools for managing conflict during collaborative projects or under pressure (e.g., at sea)
   • Turning scientific disagreements into productive discussions
8. Psychological Mechanisms in Scientific Collaboration
   • Understanding relationship dynamics in long-term field missions
   • Personality factors in team compatibility and performance
9. Empathy and Emotional Intelligence in Science
   • Enhancing empathy in stakeholder meetings (e.g., with fishers, policy makers, local communities)
   • Reading group dynamics and managing emotions under uncertainty
10. Stress, Burnout, and Resilience in Marine Careers
    • Recognizing and managing burnout during intense field seasons or academic workloads
    • Coping strategies and resilience building for long-term careers in marine science
11. Heuristics and Biases in Scientific Communication
    • Recognizing cognitive biases in scientific debates and decision-making
    • Enhancing clarity and objectivity in interdisciplinary discussions

Prerequisites

none

Teaching form

Frontal lessons
Supervised small-group activities
Team-based learning
Role-play
Case simulations

Textbook and teaching resource

A selection of scientific journal articles will be provided; ppt slides and other relevant material will be uploaded on the e-learning website

Semester

first term

Assessment method

A short essay or case study: Students will analyse real-life scenarios, identifying and interconnecting various elements/variables using the knowledge acquired during the course.

Office hours

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Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY