COM 315.001: Small Group Communication  
(Service Learning)  
Spring 2014; Monday & Wednesday, 2:30-3:45 pm; T. E. Ferguson Liberal Arts 373  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
Department of Languages, Cultures, and Communication  

Instructor: Paula Hopeck, Ph.D.  
Office: Vera Dugas Liberal Arts North 418  
Phone: 468-1392 (Long distance phone calls will not be returned)  
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Spring 2014 Office Hours: MW: 1:15-2:15 pm; TR: 8:30-10:30 am; by appointment  

Course Materials:  
SunWolf. (2008). *Peer groups: Expanding our study of small group communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (can be found online through the library's website)  

Course Description: Theories, principles and skills involved in group communication. Experiential focus upon problem analysis, problem solving, and decision-making. Prerequisite: COM 170.  

Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:  
- Understand what constitutes and characterizes a small group.  
- Understand and demonstrate small group communication competencies related to discussion, problem solving, decision-making, and presenting.  
- Recognize and address challenges to small group communication in the research process with a local nonprofit organization through multiple methods of data collection.  
- Understand the role of diversity in small group communication.  
- Understand and demonstrate roles within small groups.  
- Utilize small group communication in service to a local nonprofit organization.  

Communication Studies Program Learning Outcomes. (No program learning outcomes are directly assessed in COM 315 at this time.)  
- Theory Knowledge: Students majoring in Communication Studies should display comprehension of major communication theories.  
- Theory Application: Students majoring in Communication Studies will apply the major theories in the field to communicate effectively in a variety of settings.  
- Research Methods: Students majoring in Communication Studies will be able to use and demonstrate understanding of appropriate methodology in critical, humanistic, or social scientific paradigms in examining research questions in communication.  
- Diversity and Freedom of Expression: Students majoring in Communication Studies will be able to recognize the central role of diversity and freedom of expression in a global community.  
- Constitutive Nature of Communication: Students majoring in Communication Studies will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the constitutive nature of communication, which includes
forces that enable and constrain communication such as technology, ethics, and organizational life.

- Higher Order Thinking: Students majoring in Communication Studies will be able to demonstrate oral and written competence in logical and critical thinking.

**Academic integrity.** All students are expected to submit their own, original work for this class. Auto-plagiarism, or re-using papers if you took this class before (or a class like it at another university) is also a violation of academic integrity. The SFA Student Handbook states:

“It is the responsibility of the student to abstain from cheating. Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, written assignments [completed] in or out of class, alteration of records, or illegal possession of current examinations or keys to examinations shall be considered cheating. . . Courtesy and honesty require that any ideas or materials borrowed from another must be fully acknowledged. Offering the work of another as one’s own is plagiarism. The subject matter of ideas thus taken from another may range from a few sentences or paragraphs to entire articles copied from books, periodicals, or the writing of other students. The offering of materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment is also considered plagiarism. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas or materials taken from another is guilty of plagiarism.”

**Definition of Academic Dishonesty (A.9-1).** Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

1. Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class;
2. Falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assignment; and/or,
3. Helping or attempting to help another in the act of cheating or plagiarism.
   a. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:
      i. Submitting an assignment as if it were one’s own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another;
      ii. Submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source; and,
      iii. Incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper or presentation without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A.54)**

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**Students with Disabilities.** To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).
Acceptable Student Behavior. Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the iCare program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

Food and drinks in the classroom: As per University policy, only bottled water is allowed.

Attendance. Attendance is encouraged for all students. Attendance means being on time for class and staying the entire time. Students who are 15 minutes or more late, and students who leave more than 10 minutes before class is over (unless there are extenuating circumstances and have notified the instructor ahead of time) will be marked absent for the day. A number of class sessions during the semester will be given to students to working on group projects. “Lecture” class days will cover material on the exam (potentially something not found in the textbook) and other pertinent information related to class. If you miss a lecture day, ask a classmate for the notes from the day. If you are absent, you will not receive attendance/participation points for that day. Students are permitted three absences without additional penalty. On a student’s third absence from class, the iCare program will be notified. On a student’s fourth absence from class, he or she will receive a 20-point deduction from their final grade.

**Note:** There are no “excused” absences – only “university-sanctioned” absences, meaning that if you are not in class, you must furnish documentation within one week of your absence from either the university or a physician that you were unable to attend class that day. Reasons could include illness, university-sponsored activities, or family crises. You will also be responsible for working with the instructor about how and when to make up work (i.e., exams). However, these do not count towards your running total of absences. Participation and attendance points will be prorated at the end of the semester.

Course communication. Occasionally, the instructor will need to make announcements or send reminders to students concerning the course. These announcements will be posted to D2L. Personal reminders or questions will be sent to individual students to the email account provided by the university (your titan account). If you do not use your titan account, please have your instructor’s email forwarded to the email address that you use. You may miss out on important information otherwise. Conversely, you may also let the professor know early in the semester the email address you prefer to use.

Technology. The use of cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc for things not course-related is not encouraged. The instructor has informally noted an inverse relationship between high grades and inappropriate use of technology. However, as long as your device is not making any noise, and you are not being distracting, the only person you are hurting is yourself. Put your phone on silent (not vibrate) before you enter the room. If you are the type of person who is distracted by others being on facebook, I suggest you take a seat closer to the front of the room where you will not be distracted. The one thing that will absolutely not be tolerated is having your headphones/ear buds in your ears. You will be marked absent for the day if you have these in, regardless if you are listening to music. It is rude and therefore, will also result in the loss of civility points.
**Late work.** We will be covering a lot this semester and class is fast-paced. In some extreme cases that are out of your control, you may be allowed to turn in work late for full credit. Any other cases will result in a zero for the assignment. Make sure you are coordinating with your group who is submitting what, and that everyone is on the same page about where the paper should be submitted. Some of your assignments will require online submission. Make sure that you do not wait until the last minute to submit your assignment, and that you are using capable technology, including a reliable internet connection. The assignments will also require submission to Dropbox on D2L. When you submit an assignment on D2L, Dropbox will send you an email confirming that you have submitted it. Make sure that you coordinate with your group who is submitting the work for projects that require only one submission. If you are the person, as a courtesy to the other members, forward the D2L confirmation to them so everyone is “in the loop.” For individual assignments, do not wait until the last minute to submit your work if avoidable.

**Grading policy.** In general, assignments will be returned within two weeks of submission. If there is an extenuating circumstance (i.e., instructor is out of town or has an emergency), students will be kept “in the loop” on the status of their assignments. Once grades are returned, the student must wait 24 hours before presenting the instructor with any contentions. Students will have one week to discuss their grades in person with the instructor during office hours or by appointment. When meeting, please bring an outline of points and any other related material to facilitate the discussion (graded outlines, speech critique forms, etc). Usually, grades are changed only due to a miscalculation. Some of your grades will be individual; some will be for the group. Group grades must be appealed by everyone in the group.

On a related note, D2L is updated consistently throughout the semester with your grades. If for some reason, your grade is appearing as a zero, and you completed the work, you should notify the instructor as soon as possible. If you wait until the end of the semester, nothing can be done at that point to change the situation. Your chance to earn your grade ends when the semester ends.

**Assignments:**

Point values and assignments may be adjusted at the instructor’s discretion

**Group Project**

- Group Project Proposal Packet 50
- Progress Report 25
- Group Communication Skills Articles 25
- Project Presentation 200
- Power Point 25
- Q&A Session 25
- Research Paper 100
- Executive Summary 50
- Evaluations from other group members 50
- Service Learning Reflection 50

**Attendance, Participation, Civility**

200

**Exams (2 at 100 points each)**

200

Total 1000

Grading Scale: 1000-900 – A; 899-800 – B; 799-700 – C; 699-600 – D; 599-0 – F

Grades are on a point-value scale, so there is no “rounding up.” To obtain your grade, simply total up the points that you have accumulated.
Group Project (600 points total). – Early submission of work is highly encouraged. All work submitted should be typed, free of grammar and spelling errors, and in APA format (1” margins all around, double-spaced, 12-point font in Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Cambria, etc).

Project Description: Small groups will be engaging in a service learning project, in which they gain access and permission to work with a local or campus non-profit organization. Research about the organization’s group communication will be conducted and interpreted to identify how a skills training could be designed to meet the group communication needs of the organization.

- Research will be conducted about the organization’s functioning, communication, coworker/volunteer relations, and use of small groups such as departments, work teams, committees, etc...
  - The project is a multi-part project with grades stemming from the proposal packet, progress presentation, group communication skills articles, project presentation, project packet, group participation, and service learning hours with reflection paper.

- The group project proposal packet must contain (all typed and worth 50 points):
  - Signed permission letter granting the group access to the organization
  - Proposed set of interview questions
  - Proposed use of questionnaires/instruments
  - Project proposal explaining the organization, why the organization was selected, the goals of the group, and the timeline for accomplishing the project.
  - APA reference page with research used to gain information about the organization (i.e. the organization’s website).

- Progress Report (worth 25 points)
  - Introduction to the organization
  - Explanation of goals accomplished so far and goals to be accomplished (when and how) (number of interviews planned versus completed, number of surveys collected, etc)
  - Must be presented by all group members in class on March 5 – instructor may ask questions of the group

- Group Communication Skills Articles (worth 25 points)
  - Individuals must find 2 articles about group communication (i.e. leadership, meeting management, group participation, problem solving, etc...) to summarize and link.
    - Article 1: academic journal from either the field of communication or management.
    - Article 2: a popular press article from sources such as the NY Times, Wall Street Journal or Harvard Business Review.
  - These articles will become a database for groups to use for the skills training.

- Project Data Collection: Groups must work diligently to:
  - Interview 4-6 organizational members,
  - Implement questionnaires/instruments to as many organizational members as possible
  - Conduct participant observation to learn about the organizations functioning, communication, coworker, relations, and use of small groups such as departments, work teams, committees, etc....
• **Project Data Interpretation:** The end product of interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation should identify:
  - Group communication strengths
  - Group communication areas for improvement
  - These conclusions must be supported by data. Quotes should from interviews, field notes from meetings, and results from questionnaires/instruments should be used to support conclusions. Generate graphs of statistical data.

• **Project Skills Training:** After identifying challenges to small group functioning, the group should design a communication skills training/intervention for the organization that addresses the challenges directly. Effective trainings combine education, motivation, experiential learning, and constructive criticism over a period of time to develop effective patterns of communicative behavior. Use the articles in the database on Blackboard.

• **Project Presentation** (PowerPoint and oral presentation worth 200 points)
  - 20-30 minute group presentation
  - Use of PowerPoint (25 points)
  - Introduction to organization, group goals
  - Explanation of data collection (how many interviews and how long, how many meetings, how many questionnaires returned, how many service hours total to the organization)
  - Interpretation of data with supportive quotes and statistics
    - Strengths of organization’s group communication skills
    - Areas of improvement for the organization’s group communication skills
    - Utilization of quotes from interviews, field notes from participant observation, statistics from questionnaires
  - Proposed group communication skills training to address specified areas of improvement
    - Clarity of skills needed
    - Support of skills from research (textbook and article database on Blackboard)
    - Creativity of skills training (educational and application components)
  - Group Conclusion
  - APA style reference slide
  - All group members should participate in the presentation. A 15-minute question and answer period will follow (worth 25 points).
  - Please invite representatives of the organizations selected for the group project to attend the presentation.

• **Research paper** (all typed, submitted in a binder, use tabs to differentiate sections, and worth 100 points)
  - Cover page with group name and member’s names
  - Table of contents
  - Permission letter
  - Project Written Report (6-8 pages double-spaced – page limit does NOT include title page and references)
    - Introduction to organization
    - Group goals and timeline of data collection
    - Identification and explanation of methodology used to gather data
• Summation of interpretation of organization’s group communication strengths and areas for improvement, using the articles submitted to the group database
• Summation of skills training
• Conclusion
• APA style reference page
• Submit this portion only to Dropbox on D2L
  o Copy of PowerPoint slides from the project presentation (print 3-4 slides per page)
  o Copies of finalized interview guides and questionnaires
  o Results of surveys (create a chart)
  o Typed copies of minutes from all group meetings
  o Copies of slides from progress presentation and grade form from the progress presentation

• Executive summary (50 points)
  ▪ Condensed version of your paper (1-2 pages) that you will submit to the organization.
  ▪ Should be clear and concise, focus on the findings and overall results – keep specifics for the paper.
  ▪ Submit to the organization’s leadership after being approved by the instructor.

• Peer Evaluations (50 points)
  o You will be critiqued by your group members on a number of dimensions related to group work (online).
  o The evaluations will be made available to you starting April 2 through May 9 at 12:30 pm.

• Service Learning Reflection (50 points)
  o Signed confirmation from the organization that you volunteered 5-7 hours during the semester
  o Three-page paper describing how the service learning project
    ▪ Helped you learn and apply group communication skills
    ▪ Added value to the organization that you volunteered for and researched during the semester

Attendance, participation, and civility (200 points).

Attendance and participation. A significant portion of your grade also depends on your attendance and in-class participation. I realize that students may participate in different ways. My philosophy is that participation includes contributing to class discussion in a meaningful way, listening to lecture and the contributions of other students, and completing in-class activities. Participation is NOT sleeping, reading the newspaper or other media, listening to music, holding side conversations with other students, or using technology for activities not related class. If you are engaging in any of these activities, you will not receive attendance/participation points for the day. You earn points for attending each class – even if you have a university-sanctioned absence, you cannot make up attendance points. Instead, these will be pro-rated at the end of the semester.

On Monday, January 27, a 10-point, “open book” syllabus quiz will be given. These points will count towards the participation grade.
Civility. Civility is expected in all interactions (including email) with your classmates and instructors. Lack of civility includes rudeness, sarcasm, raised voices, cursing, name calling, threats, and bullying. Rudeness also includes texting or doing other inappropriate activities during student presentations. If you engage in any of these behaviors, you will automatically lose 20 points. Violations of this rule more than once will result in the loss of another 20 points per infraction, and reporting to the iCare program. The great news is, most – if not, all – of you will get these points just for being yourselves!

**Exams** (100 points each – 200 points total). Exams will be multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and true/false. To succeed on the exams, here are some tips:

1. Keep up with the readings – at the very least, have a general idea about each of the chapters.
2. Attend class and take notes from lecture. Outlines will be available on D2L prior to class; however, changes will be made and it’s up to you to fill in the blanks.
3. Ask questions about content when you have them, either in class, during office hours, or via email.
4. Meet the objectives at the beginning of each chapter in Myers and Anderson. These will serve as the “study guide” for the exams.

**Tentative Course Schedule (subject to change at the discretion of the instructor)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic(s) covered, in-class assignment</th>
<th>Readings (to be read ahead of time), and work due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon., Jan. 13</td>
<td>Introduction to course</td>
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</table>
| Weds., Jan. 15| Components of Small Groups
Small Group Socialization                               | MA – Ch. 1 & 2                                                   |
| Mon., Jan 20  | **NO CLASS**                                                                             |                                                                  |
| Weds., Jan. 22| Personality & Diversity in groups                                                         | MA – Ch. 3 & 4                                                   |
| Mon., Jan. 27 | *Syllabus Quiz
Group project assigned; groups formed                                                   |                                                                  |
| Weds., Jan. 29| **Discussion of targeted organizations and justification; decide on division of hours and tasks** |                                                                  |
| Mon., Feb. 3  | Peer Group Lenses;
Conducting research – interviews & surveys (Qualtrics)                                    | SW – Prologue and Ch. 1                                          |
| Weds., Feb. 5 | Small Group Development Models
Conducting research – participant observation & library database use                      | MA – Ch. 5                                                      |
| Mon., Feb. 10 | Diversity in groups
Characteristics of Small Group Tasks                                                        | MA – Ch. 4 & 6                                                  |
| Weds., Feb. 12| **Discuss proposed use of interview questions, surveys for target organization and timeline.** |                                                                  |
| Mon., Feb. 17 | Peer Groups that Super-Task                                                                | SW – Ch. 5                                                      |
| Weds., Feb. 19| Small Group Decision Making Procedures;
Peer Groups as Decision Makers: Juries                                                       | MA – Ch. 7
SW – Ch. 6                                                          |
<p>| Mon., Feb. 24 | Development of Small Group Roles;                                                          | MA – Ch. 8                                                      |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weds., Feb. 26</td>
<td>Exam Review</td>
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<td>*Project Proposal Packet due at the beginning of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., March 3</td>
<td>Project Proposal Packet due at the beginning of class</td>
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<td>Assessment of group progress; library research and article readings</td>
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<td>Weds., March 5</td>
<td>1st Exam covering</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MA – Ch. 1-7; SW – Ch. 1, 5, 6; lecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., March 10</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., March 12</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<td>Mon., March 17</td>
<td>Relational Communication Among Small Group Members;</td>
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<td>Presenting as a Group</td>
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<td>MA – Ch. 10; Appendix B</td>
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<td>*Articles and summaries due to D2L discussion board by 5 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., March 19</td>
<td>Presenting as a group – division of speaking responsibilities,</td>
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<td>handling of Q &amp; A, Power Point</td>
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<td>Mon., March 24</td>
<td>Guest lecture – Dr. Elizabeth Spradley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., March 26</td>
<td>Conflict in the Small Group</td>
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<td>Mon., March 31</td>
<td>Cohesion and Climate in the Small Group;</td>
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<td>Review for Exam 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., April 2</td>
<td>2nd Exam covering;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MA Ch. 8-12, Appendix B; lecture</td>
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<td>Mon., April 7</td>
<td>Data analysis and write-up of final results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., April 9</td>
<td>Data analysis and write-up of final results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., April 14</td>
<td>Presentations and Research Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., April 16</td>
<td>Presentations and Research Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., April 21</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., April 23</td>
<td>Presentations and Research Papers</td>
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<td>Mon., April 28</td>
<td>Presentations and Research Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weds., April 30</td>
<td>Presentations and Research Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri., May 9</td>
<td>10:30 am - 12:30 pm</td>
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<td>12:30 pm – Executive Summary, Peer Evaluations, and Service Learning</td>
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<td>Self-Reflection due to D2L</td>
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**Important University Dates:**
- Last Day to Register: Thursday, January 16
- Twelfth Class Day: Wednesday, January 29
- Mid-semester: Wednesday, March 5
- Last Day to Drop or Withdraw without WP or WF: Wednesday, March 19
- Last Day to Withdraw from the University: Tuesday, April 22
- Finals Week: May 5-9