

ODKM 740: Learning Community

Faculty: Tojo Thatchenkery

Fall 2024- Spring 2026

Van Meter Hall 125 & 126

For Cohort 29 only

This is a closed course and open only to students admitted to the MS in ODKM program for the fall 2024 semester. Requirements in this syllabus apply specifically to cohort 29.

Class dates for fall 2024: Saturdays, September 14 & November 16

Class date for spring 2025: Saturday, February 1 (snow day: February 8)

Class dates for fall 2025: Saturdays, September 13 & November 15

Class date for spring 2026: Saturday, January 31, 2026

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

ODKM 740 has three overarching and related goals:

- 1) To envision and build a learning Community of Practice (CoP).
- 2) To reflect upon and analyze the community building experience using research findings and theories.
- 3) To explore ideas and practices that support action learning, new ways of organizing work, collaborative work environments, and learning organizations.

The emphasis of the learning community is on reflection, theory building, practice and action learning. The planning group designing each event will provide advance reading and other relevant material to facilitate the learning community session. Students are expected to have assimilated the reading material before coming to the learning community class and be prepared to participate in the discussions.

Through a consultative and collaborative process each planning group will be put in touch with a subject matter expert (SME) in the field once they have decided upon a theme/topic for the session. They will meet with the SME at least once and learn about the latest offering and design thinking in that thematic area. The SME may

also offer feedback for the final design during the dry run meeting with the faculty. Students should not start any planning work before meeting with the SME.

A key aspect of your Learning Community experience is managing oneself while navigating the group's dynamics. It is often challenging to stay mindful of these dynamics while under workload and time pressures. In several organizations, teams are often provided a team coach to assist the group to manage their interpersonal dynamics.

To assist your Learning Community team, we are providing you with a team coach, faculty member Penny Potter. She will attend your meetings and coach your team as it forms, decides on the topic, and prepares to deliver your event. This will support each of you as you build your own reflective practitioner skills to identify the team's dynamics, have necessary conversations, and productively work through challenges. It will also give you a team coaching experience prior to your ODKM 722 Coaching and OD course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Participation

ODKM 740 is a three-credit graduate course. There will be two class sessions in each of the fall terms (2024 & 2025) and one in each of the spring terms (2025 & 2026). The second session in each fall (November) will be online in order to replicate and learn from the virtual nature of many learning communities. Each class session will go from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Attendance and active participation in all six class sessions are required during the four semesters you are enrolled in the ODKM program. There will be no learning community class during the summer semester. If you miss a class during the regular sequence, you must attend another one at a later date so that your total attendance will equal to six full class days. In other words, the make-up work for missing a class will be to attend an extra session.

2. Group project report about planning, designing, and delivering a learning community session once during the four semesters

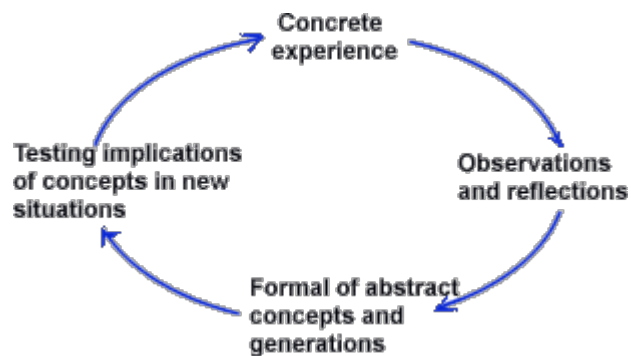
Each student is expected to participate once as a member of a *planning group* that organizes the LC sessions. The planning group organizes the LC on behalf of the community. Planning group members are required to solicit inputs from your classmates and to organize the LC activities in such a way as to meet the three learning goals stated in the beginning of this syllabus. The planning group will have a minimum of four meetings with the faculty: A design preparation meeting, a status-check meeting, a dry run meeting, and a debriefing immediately after the LC.

The planning group will submit a group project report of about 15 pages describing what they have learned through the experience.

3. Personal Reflection and Application Essay (PRAE)

²The Personal Reflection and Application Essay should integrate various aspects of

your experiences in the learning community. Following the ideas of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and David Kolb, an experiential learning cycle will have four components: *concrete experience* (CE), *reflective observation* (RO), *abstract conceptualization* (AC), and *active experimentation* (AE).



The assignment should be written based on your experience participating in various learning community sessions or about designing and delivering a learning community event. The PRAE will be due at the end of the fourth semester, fall 2025 (the group planning the spring 2026 session may have a later date mutually decided by them and the faculty).

Concrete Experience (CE): You will have two choices in deciding what constitutes the CE for your essay. You may write about all six of your LC sessions and about the experience designing and delivering a LC day during the program. Or, you may pick a few of the LC sessions (1-6) and the experience of designing and conducting the LC day. In this scenario, you may feel that each or some of the learning community sessions were so valuable to you that you would like to write about them (as CE).

The second choice is to write only about the experience of designing and delivering the LC day. You feel that the experience of planning and delivering the learning community alone is so rich that you want to explore it further by writing a reflective essay about it.

Reflective Observation (RO): In this section, you should make an intentional effort to reflect on the experiences chosen from multiple perspectives. The perspectives that come to your mind first are yours (personal) and will only form the first part of your RO. Next, think about the other ways that you may make sense of the experience. If you were to go to a couple of your trusted friends, what might they say about your experiences and reflections? In most cases, the multiple perspectives should challenge your personal views.

Another approach to enrich your RO section is to generate reflections by raising questions. For example, was your immediate reaction to the event shaped by your experiences in a previous job? New insights often emerge when you reflect

methodically on your experiences. To keep the PRAE to a manageable size, you should identify **three themes or concepts** at the end of this section and build on them further in the next segment, the AC.

Abstract Conceptualizing (AC): In this section you should begin to theorize or conceptualize the reflective observations and experiences using readings and concepts. The planning group of each of the learning community will provide you with a reading list of at least three books and three articles related to the topic of the day. This list should be your first source for the AC. If that is not sufficient, you may use readings from the texts of various ODKM courses as well as the books listed in this syllabus. You cannot repeat a reading used in a previous PRAE or any assignments in the ODKM program unless you state the need to do so and acknowledge the reuse. Given the extensive and rich amount readings available on CoP and the various themes of the sessions, repeating a reading used in a previous PRAE should be avoided.

You should clearly show how the theories apply to your experiences (CE) and reflections (RO). Please read the checklist at the end of this syllabus before you start working on the essay.

Active Experimentation (AE): This section is your opportunity to suggest what you would do differently based on your new learning generated in AC. In other words, you should not only describe and reflect on the experiences, but must also consider experimenting with new learning and action plans. You should be specific and concrete in what you propose to do.

Please be aware of the distinction between intention statements and AE. For example, proposing that you will improve your conflict management capabilities is only an intention statement. Specific actions such as meeting with a friend to talk about how you deal with difficult situations, filling out an instrument to recognize your conflict-handling styles, reading a specific book on conflict by a specific date, and signing up for a conflict management workshop are all examples of specific AEs.

A PRAE will be about 25 pages long with at least ten pages devoted to theories and concepts (AC). Please email your PRAE on or before the due date to thatchen@gmu.edu. Please see the checklist at the end of this syllabus. A paper copy is not needed. Late submissions will be penalized.

PRAE due date:

Friday, December 5, 2025, for cohort 29 (who started in fall 2024)

The planning group designing the spring 2026 learning community session may have a later due date based on mutual consultation between that group and the faculty.

HOURLY REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

One hundred and thirty hours or more of active learning is required to receive a passing grade in this course. Course grade will be assigned at the end of your final semester which will be the spring of 2026 for cohort 29. You will register for the course only in the final semester (spring 2026 for cohort 29). Since the grade points are built over five semesters, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have fulfilled the necessary requirements in each semester. If you receive a failing grade (less than 70%) in either the PRAE or the group project report, you cannot receive a pass for the course irrespective of your total score.

| Activity | Estimated time | Grade Points |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|
| Instructor evaluation of your attendance & participation (Two sessions in fall 2024, one in spring 2025, two in fall 2025, and one in spring 2026, to a total of six sessions during four semesters). | 6 x 8= 48 hours | 10 grade points* |
| Planning and organizing a learning community once during the program and writing a project report about it | 62 hours | 40 grade points** |
| Confidential peer team evaluation of your planning group using the evaluation format listed in this syllabus. | | 10 grade points*** |
| Personal Application and Reflection Essay (PRAE) | 20 hours | 40 grade points |
| Total | 130 hours | 100 points |

* Instructor evaluation will be based on attendance and contribution to class discussions and organizational analysis project.

**Your individual score for the group assignment will also be determined by the team evaluation score you will receive. For example, if your group receives 38 of 40 points for the report, and your team evaluation score is 9.00 of 10, your individual score for the group report will be $38 \times 0.90 = 34.20$.

*** Team evaluation will be based on members' participation and contribution to all the activities of the planning group.

The following scale will be used to determine your course grade out of a total of 100 points.

98-100 = A+

93 - 97.99 = A

90 - 92.99 = A-

86 - 89.99 = B+

83 - 85.99 = B

80- 82.99 = B-

70 - 79.99 = C

69.99 and below = F

If you are a student with a disability needing academic accommodations, please let the professor know and contact the Disability Services (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>) at 703 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the Disability Services before the beginning of the class. Late submissions will be penalized.

[GMU & Schar School policy on plagiarism](#)

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus, any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of education. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics. Plagiarism is the use of others' words or ideas presented as one's own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of others' work or derived from **artificial intelligence-enabled tools** such as ChatGPT. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources are essential while writing your assignments. The faculty of the Schar School has adopted a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F" and may lead to failure for the course.

To help enforce the Schar School's policy on plagiarism, your written work may be compared with electronic databases and submitted to commercial services to which the Schar School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student's work to such services without prior permission from the student. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code. It is not intended to replace or substitute the GMU policy.

You must cite each time you reuse any of your own work indicating all previous uses you have made of the same work. Using the same citations (readings) from other assignments written for any other professor should be acknowledged (Please see additional restrictions in the PRAE checklist).

Suggested Course Readings

Gwen Stirling-Wilkie (2021). *From Physical Place to Virtual Space: How to Design and Host Transformative Spaces Online*. New York: BMI Publishing.

Addleson, Mark. (2011). *Beyond Management: Taking Charge at Work*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Allee, Verna (2000). Knowledge Networks and Communities of Practice. *OD Practitioner* 32, Fall/Winter (4).

Baker, Ann (2009). *Catalytic Conversations: Organizational Communication and Innovation*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Barton, David., & Tusting, Karin. (Eds). (2005). *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language Power and Social Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Block, Peter. (2008). *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett- Koehler.

Block, Peter. (2001). *The Answer to How Is Yes: Acting On What Matters*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Bopaiah, M. (2021). *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*. Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco.

Born, Paul. (2014). *Deepening Community: Finding joy together in chaotic times*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Brown, Junita., & Issacs, David. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Brown, John Seely., & Denning, Stephen., Groh, Katalina., & Prusak, Laurence. (2004). *Storytelling in Organizations : Why Storytelling Is Transforming 21st Century Organizations and Management*. New York: Butterworth Heinemann.

Brown, John Seely & Duguid, Paul. (1991). Organizational Learning and Communities of Practice. *Organization Science*, 2, 4057

Edmondson, Amy. (2012). *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hara, Noriko. (2008). *Communities of Practice: Fostering Peer-to-Peer Learning and Informal Knowledge Sharing in the Work Place*. New York: Springer

Hildreth, Paul., & Kimble, Chris. (Eds). (2004). *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. New York. IGI Global

Hughes, Jason. (2007). *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Lave, Jean., & Wenger, Etienne. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McKnight, John., & Block, Peter. (2010). *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*. San Francisco: Berrett-

Koehler.

Mirvis, Philip., Ayas, Karen, and Roth, George L. (2003). *To the desert and back: The story of one of the most dramatic business transformations on record*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Putnam, Robert., & Romeny, Shaylyn (2021). *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ryan, Tim. (2012). *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit*. New York: Hay House.

Saint Onge, Hubert., & Wallace, Debra. (2003). *Leveraging communities of practice for strategic advantage*. New York: Butterworth Heinemann.

Thatchenkery, T., and Chaudhry, D. (2007). *Appreciative inquiry and knowledge management: A social constructionist perspective*. Cheltenham, U.K. Edward Elgar.

Wenger, Etienne., McDermott, Richard., & Snyder William., (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Wheatley, Margaret., & Frieze, Deborah. (2011). *Walk out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Academic Standards

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, coauthored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. [The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures here.](#) Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

Student responsibility

Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu. Phone: (703) 993-2474.

Student responsibility

Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

Student responsibility

Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

Title IX Resources and Required Reporting

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct,

please see University Policy 1202: [Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to TitleIX@gmu.edu, by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

Student opportunity

If you prefer to speak to someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in [Student Support & Advocacy \(SSAC\)](#), Counseling and [Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#), and/or the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).