

# Communication Theory

COMM 2315 | I Summer 2011

Mon.-Thurs., 8-10 a.m.

Fine Arts Building Room 409

**Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith**

**Office:** 2114 Fine Arts Building

**Hours:** 10-10:30 a.m. Tues. & Thurs., & by appt.

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Note: Because of other department and university duties, office hours occasionally will be cancelled. Cancellations will be posted on the office door and, when possible, announced in class and/or via email.

## **Required Text and Class Materials**

Wood, J. (2004). *Communication theories in action: An introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning

Bound notebook for journaling

Scantron Form NO. 882-E (five) and a number 2 pencil for weekly quizzes

## **Course Description**

This course is designed for students who are new to the field of communication theory. Throughout the course, I aim to show you that communication theories, as well as the process of theorizing, are interesting and relevant to everyday life. The course is organized to provide you with foundations for understanding theorizing and opportunities to explore and apply those foundations in relation to particular theories. You will be encouraged to think critically and integratively about theories while you explore the connections between theories and reflect on how claims of one theory relate to those of other theories.

## **Course Objectives.**

Although everyone is a theorist, not everyone is equally skilled at theorizing. Like any other activity, theorizing can be done well or poorly. Effective theorizing is based on knowing what theories are and how to evaluate their validity and value. In this course, you will learn how to test and assess theories. In turn, this will allow you to theorize more effectively about communication in your life. Thus, you will enlarge your ability to understand and control your interactions with others. In sum, this course aims to help you:

- Discover the power of theory to enhance your understanding of communication and your effectiveness as communicators,
- Develop your ability to think theoretically and critically,
- Enlarge your appreciation of multiple and complex ways in which communication is part of your everyday lives, and
- Develop an awareness and appreciation for diversity in social life.

## **Requirements and Grading**

Your performance in the course will be evaluated as follows:

### **Assessment**

Class Participation  
Quizzes (5 percent each)  
Journal  
Team Presentation  
Final Exam

### **Grading**

25%  
25%  
20%  
15%  
15%

### **Scale:**

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

**Class Participation:** This will be a highly interactive course, with class time divided on Mondays and Tuesdays among lecture, discussion and group activities. Discussion and group work is intended to help students process and absorb the lecture/reading material. Participation will be evaluated based on asking insightful questions and contributing informed, thoughtful comments. Students who sit silently and contribute nothing will receive a zero for participation.

**Quizzes:** Each Thursday, students will take a quiz over the lecture and reading material covered that week. Each quiz will contain 20 multiple choice and true/false questions. Students first will complete the quiz individually. Students then will complete the same quiz in teams. At the start of the semester, students will choose a team of 4-5 students to work with for the entire semester.

Class starts at 8 a.m., and quizzes will be handed out at 8:05 a.m. Students will have 30 minutes to complete the quiz individually. Those who arrive late will be allowed to take the quiz, but they will have only whatever time remains of that 30 minutes. For instance, if the student arrives 15 minutes into the individual quiz, he/she will have only 15 minutes to take the quiz. Individual quizzes will NOT be accepted if after the group quiz has started.

Immediately after the individual quiz is collected, the team will have 50 minutes to take the same quiz using an IF-AT form, which I will provide. We will spend the remaining class time discussing the answers. PLEASE BRING A SCANTRON FORM NO. 882-E AND A NO. 2 PENCIL FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL QUIZ. There will be five quizzes total, each one worth 5 percent of the students' total course grade. Individual and team quizzes will be averaged for the student's quiz grade.

A student who misses a quiz due to extreme illness, severe injury or death in the family must present official documentation excusing the absence AT THE NEXT CLASS SESSION he/she attends and make up the quiz within 24 hours of returning to class. Make-up quizzes will be an alternate version of the quiz taken in class, and the student's individual grade on that quiz will constitute the entire quiz score. Students will not be permitted to make up quizzes without documentation of one of those three reasons.

**Journals:** Communication Theory Journals encourage students to think about and apply lecture/reading material to communication in society as well as in their personal relationships and activities. Students are to complete hand-written journal entries in a bound notebook for each class day, except quiz days. Each entry should be AT LEAST one FULL single-spaced page or two FULL double-spaced pages. Entries are to be dated, with the topic of the entry at the top of the page and underlined. Each day's topic will be provided verbally at the end of class as well as posted in the announcements section of Blackboard.

Students should bring their journals to class each day. Often, students will have time at the end of class to work on journaling and will not be permitted to leave early if they don't have their journals with them.

Journals will be collected for review every Thursday at the start of class, and that week's entries will be checked for completeness at that time. Journals will not be graded for content until the end of the term, but students will have 5 percent deducted from the final journal grade for each incomplete mark accumulated from journal checks during the term. An incomplete mark will be given for failure to produce three entries of appropriate length as specified above for that week.

Journal entries will be assessed based on the student's demonstrated understanding of theoretical principals involved and strength of argument in the application of those principals.

**Final Exam:** At the end of the term, students will take a cumulative final exam composed of 100 multiple choice and true/false questions (similar to those on the weekly quizzes) and one essay question similar to those used for daily journal entries.

**Team Presentations:** Each Wednesday (beginning week 2), teams will make presentations discussing how a Hollywood film illustrates concepts covered in class and in the textbook. Teams will consist of 2-3 members and will come from the quiz teams chosen on the first day of class.

On the third day of class, quiz teams will draw from a hat the theory that the entire team will cover. The team then will be given a list of films that exemplify that theory. The team will split into two teams, and each smaller team will select one film from the list. Each smaller team must choose a different film.

It would be wise to select a film to which one of the team members has easy access, if possible. Otherwise, films may be obtained from a local library or video store. If students choose to watch the film online, be aware that students must be able to present relevant clips of the film in class.

Students should become intimately familiar with the theory involved BEFORE watching the film. Carefully reading the relevant chapter in the text would be the best way to accomplish this.

In the presentations, students must include all of the following:

1. A brief description of the movie, characters, and the scene(s) selected.
2. Summary of key concepts from one or more theories that are relevant to your presentation; one MUST be the assigned theory, but others may be included as well.
3. Relevant scene(s) from the movie. These should be on DVD or online.
4. Key communication concepts illustrated in the scene(s).
5. Explanation of how communication theory helps better understand why people communicated the way they did in the clip(s) viewed.
6. Explanation of how the assigned theory helps derive a deeper understanding of communication in everyday life by applying the relevant concepts to real-life situations and communication examples.

All presentations should be **no less than 20 minutes but no longer than 25 minutes in length**. Teams that go under 20 minutes or over 25 minutes will be penalized 10 percent.

Four teams will present each week, primarily focusing on the two theories covered in that week's lecture. Students not scheduled to present still are required to attend class and will have time at the end of class to journal about the presentations.

At the end of each presentation, the team must provide a written memo indicating the extent to which each member participated in the preparation and presentation of the assignment. **The memo MUST be signed by each team member.** This is part of the presentation grade. Students who do not sign the memo will receive a zero on the assignment, and students who admittedly fail to carry equal weight with other teammates will be penalized accordingly. The best solution is for all students to participate equally in the assignment.

**ALL GROUP MEMBERS MUST BE PRESENT FOR THE PRESENTATION.** If a student is going to miss the presentation day due to extreme illness, severe injury or death in the family, the student should contact his/her teammates AND the instructor BEFORE CLASS and present official documentation excusing the absence AT THE NEXT CLASS SESSION he/she attends. If this procedure is followed, the entire team will be permitted to reschedule the presentation for a time later in the term when all team members will be there. **PRESENTATIONS CANNOT BE RESCHEDULED FOR ANY REASON OTHER THAN EXTREME ILLNESS, SEVERE INJURY, OR FAMILY DEATH.** If the student is unable to present official documentation of one of those reasons at the next class session, the rest of the team will be permitted to make up the assignment, but the student who caused the rescheduling will not and will receive a zero.

If a student simply does not show up for the presentation, the rest of the team will be expected to present without him/her, and the absent student will receive a zero.

## **Behavior expectations**

Students are learning to be communication professionals and are expected to model the following professional behaviors in class:

- Arrive to class on time and ready to participate.
- Turn cell phones to silent.
- Respect others; don't speak when someone else is speaking.
- Listen closely and disagree calmly with others' opinions.
- Do not text message, check personal e-mail, instant message, surf the Web or study for other classes during class time. **Students WILL be asked to leave the class if they are inattentive/disruptive.** Students who are asked to leave will be counted absent.

## **Attendance Expectations**

Students are to treat the class like a job; they are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Work completed in class weighs heavily on the student's grade; therefore, failure to come to class will affect students' grades adversely. Absences from lecture are neither excused nor unexcused; students receive one free absence to use at their own discretion over the course of the term. Additional absences, regardless of the reason, will result in the student receiving zeros for class work on the days he/she was absent. FREE ABSENCES CANNOT BE TAKEN ON QUIZ, EXAM OR PRESENTATION DAYS.

***Tardiness will not be tolerated.*** Students who are not seated and ready to begin class by 8:05 will be counted absent.

## **Tentative Course Schedule & Due Dates**

The course schedule is tentative and is subject to change. Minor changes will be noted in class; major changes will result in the handout of a revised schedule. Due dates for major assignments and exams are unlikely to change. All readings for the week should be completed prior to class. The instructor will distribute supplemental material throughout the semester for which students also are responsible.

Week	Dates	Topics/Class Readings/Due Dates
1	June 6 June 7 June 8 June 9	Course Introduction/Defining Communication (Chapter 1) Understanding, Building and Testing Theories (Chapters 2-3) An Early Communication Theory (Chapter 4) Quiz 1/Journal Check
2	June 13 June 14 June 15 June 16	Theories About Symbolic Activity (Chapter 5) Theories About Performance (Chapter 6) Group Presentations, Groups 1-4 Quiz 2/Journal Check
3	June 20 June 21 June 22 June 23	Theories About How People Construct Meaning (Chapter 7) Theories About Interpersonal Dynamics (Chapter 8) Group Presentations, Groups 5-8 Quiz 3/Journal Check
4	June 27 June 28 June 29 June 30	Theories About Communication & the Evolution of Relationships (Ch. 9) Theories About Communication Communities (Chapter 10) Group Presentations, Groups 9-12 Quiz 4/Journal Check
5	July 4 July 5 July 6 July 7	Theories of Mass Communication (Chapter 11) Critical Communication Theories (Chapter 12) Group Presentations, Groups 13-16 Quiz 5/Journal Check
<b>FINAL</b>	July 11	Final Exam given at regular class time (8-10 a.m.) Final Journal Collection

## **Department, College, and University Policies**

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of federal legislation entitled *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

As a faculty member, the instructor is required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their needs for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Students should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester if they need accommodations in this course.

Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at <http://www.uta.edu/disability>. Also, students may visit the Office for Students with Disabilities in room 102 of University Hall or call them at (817) 272-3364.

**Student Support Services:** The University supports a variety of student success programs to help them connect with the University and achieve academic success. They include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at (817) 272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals.

**Bomb Threats:** If anyone is tempted to call in a bomb threat, be aware the UTA will attempt to trace the phone call and prosecute all responsible parties. Every effort will be made to avoid cancellation of presentations/tests caused by bomb threats. Unannounced alternate sites will be available for these classes. The instructor will make students aware of alternate class sites in the event that their classroom is not available.

**Guests:** Students sometimes ask to bring guests to class with them. Because guests are often a distraction, the instructor generally discourages students from bringing guests such as friends, parents, spouses, significant others and children. However, the instructor is willing to accommodate guests in the classroom on a case by case basis if a request is submitted IN ADVANCE. If the instructor approves the guest coming to class, the guest must follow class policies regarding behavior (including computer usage) and should not become a distraction to the instructor or students, or he or she will be asked to leave. Be aware that seating accommodations will be provided to the guest only if all registered students for the course have a place to sit and a computer at which to work.

**Drop policy:** Last day to drop for the first summer session is **June 27**. It is the responsibility of the student to initiate the drop policy. Students need to go to their major departments to drop a class. (For example, if a student is a HISTORY MAJOR and wants to drop a MATH class, the student needs to go to the HISTORY DEPARTMENT to drop the class.).

**E-culture policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University e-mail address as an official means of communication with students. Through the use of e-mail, UT-Arlington is able to provide students with relevant and timely information, designed to facilitate student success. In particular, important information concerning registration, financial aid, payment of bills, and graduation may be sent to students through e-mail. All students are assigned an e-mail account, and information about activating and using it is available at <http://www.uta.edu/email>. New students (first semester at UTA) are able to activate their e-mail accounts 24 hours after registering for courses. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, and it remains active as long as a student is enrolled at UT-Arlington. Students are responsible for checking their e-mail regularly.

**Grade policy:** Department policy prevents the instructor from sending out grade information via e-mail. Students may come to office hours to talk about their grades.

**Grade grievances:** If students feel they have been assigned a grade unfairly, they may take advantage of a grade grievance process. Please refer to the university catalog for more information.

**Academic honesty:** Academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form at The University of Texas at Arlington. All people involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

“Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.” (Regents’ Rules and Regulations, Part One, Chapter VI, Section 3, Subsection 3.2, Subdivision 3.22).

The instructor takes academic honesty seriously. At the very minimum, violating the university or class standards for academic honesty will result in a zero on the offending class assignment, quiz or exam. Depending on the severity of the violation, the instructor may assign students an “F” for the course. The instructor will report any violations to the Office of Judicial Affairs and will pursue hearings there if necessary.