

# Communication Theory

COMM 2315 | Summer 2012

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. Mon. & Wed., & 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

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 after the group quiz has started.

Immediately after the individual quiz is collected, the team will have 50 minutes to take the same quiz. 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 journal entries on the class blog for each class day, except quiz days. Each entry should be AT LEAST 500 words. Each day's topic will be provided verbally at the end of class as well as posted in the announcements section of Blackboard.

Journals will be graded periodically throughout the term. The instructor will not announce when the journals will be graded, so students must keep up with the journal each day. Critically thinking through the concepts discussed in class via journal entries will assist students in understanding the concepts as they prepare for the weekly quizzes.

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, for any reason, will result in the student receiving zeros for class work on days she/he was absent. FREE ABSENCES CANNOT BE USED FOR QUIZZES, THE EXAM OR YOUR TEAM'S PRESENTATION.

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

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

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline by calling 817-272-6107, sending a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or visiting [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory will be asked to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS) about the course and how it was taught. Instructions on how to access the SFS system will be sent directly to students through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback data is required by state law; student participation in the SFS program is voluntary.

**Academic Integrity:** At UT Arlington, academic dishonesty is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any form, including (but 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" (UT System Regents' Rule 50101, §2.2). Suspected violations of academic integrity standards will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.