

# Communication Theory

## COMM 2315 | Summer 2014

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

COBA Room 149

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

**Office:** 2114 Fine Arts Building

**Hours:** 10-10:30 a.m. Mon.-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**

Griffin, E. (2011). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

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 do the following:

- 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.
- Develop an awareness of and appreciation for diversity in social life.

### **Requirements and Grading**

Your performance in the course will be evaluated as follows:

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Grading</b>
Class Participation	25%
Individual Quizzes	25%
Group Quizzes	25%
Team Presentation	25%

### **Scale:**

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

**All grades will be posted to Blackboard** (<http://elearn.uta.edu>). Please log in regularly to check grades and announcements. No grade information will be emailed. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester on Blackboard and seek guidance if their grade drops below satisfactory levels.

**Class Participation:** This will be a highly interactive course, with class time divided 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 week, 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 three students to work with for the entire semester.

Class starts at 8 a.m., and quizzes will be handed out immediately. Students will have 30 minutes to complete the quiz individually. Immediately after the individual quiz is collected, the team will have 50 minutes to take the same quiz.

PLEASE BRING A SCANTRON FORM NO. 882-E AND A NO. 2 PENCIL FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL QUIZ.  
The team quiz also must be completed on one Scantron, provided by the team. Make arrangements each week to decide who will bring that week's team Scantron.

Those who arrive within the 30-minute individual quiz time 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 late, he/she will have only 15 minutes to take the quiz. All students must put down their pencils and pass forward their quizzes when time is called. Students are not to continue filling out the Scantron while the instructor collects the quizzes.

Students who arrive after the team quiz begins will not be permitted to join their teams and benefit from the work of their peers, who will be better prepared to discuss the answers because they have already taken the individual quiz. The tardy student will be permitted to take the quiz individually at that time (in the hallway, so the student will not be privy to discussions occurring in the classroom), with the same 30-minute limit afforded to the rest of the class for the individual quiz. The student will receive a 0 for the team quiz.

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.

**Team Presentations:** Each week (beginning week 2), teams will make presentations discussing how a Hollywood film illustrates concepts covered in class and in the textbook. Presentation teams will be the same as the three-person quiz teams chosen on the first day of class.

On the third day of class, quiz teams will be assigned randomly the theory that the team will cover. The team then will be given a list of films that exemplify the theory and will select one film from the list.

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 online. If students choose to watch the film online, be aware that teams must be able to present relevant clips of the film in class. (Other students have accomplished this through YouTube.)

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. INTRO: A **BRIEF** description of the plot and characters. Do not delve into great detail; tell just enough for your peers to understand the clips. This should be a minute part of the project.
2. Summary of key concepts from **YOUR ASSIGNED THEORY ONLY**.
3. Relevant scenes from the movie. These should be on DVD or online and take no more than half of the presentation time (i.e., no more than 10 minutes for a 20-minute presentation). **MAKE SURE YOU CAN GET TO THE RELEVANT SCENES QUICKLY**. Don't leave "dead air;" any time spent hunting for the scenes counts as part of your movie and overall presentation times.
4. Explanation of how the theoretical communication concepts are illustrated in each scene.
5. **CONCLUSION\*\***: 1) A summary of how communication theory helps better understand why people communicated the way they did in the film **AND** 2) an 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 that are similar to the film.

**\*\* NOTE:** A lot of teams fail to present a complete conclusion. Don't neglect this segment. Teams should not only summarize what they just discussed but present a thoughtful explanation of how the examples in the film can be generalized to real life. Discussing real-life situations during the presentation is not sufficient (though you may also do that); you **MUST** include a recap and thoughtful conclusion at the end.

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.

**By 8 a.m. on the day after the presentation**, EACH member of the team will submit to Blackboard a set of peer evaluation forms indicating the extent to which each individual contributed to preparation for the presentation. This quantitative measure of the teammates' participation will be averaged and counted as 20 percent of each student's individual presentation grade. **Peer evaluations will not be accepted late**. Students who fail to submit them by 8 a.m. on the day after the presentation will receive a 0 for that 20 percent of the presentation grade, regardless of how their peers evaluate their contribution.

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 must contact his/her teammates AND the instructor BEFORE CLASS and present official documentation excusing the absence AT THE NEXT CLASS SESSION he/she attends. The rest of the team will be expected to present without the missing member. If the absent student follows the above procedure, that student will be given a make-up writing assignment. If not, the student will receive a zero. Teammates still must complete a peer evaluation for that student.

**STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT ON THE PRESENTING TEAM** will have an evaluation form to fill out in class for each presentation. Evaluation forms will be collected at the conclusion of each presentation. Students who arrive late will not be permitted to enter the room during a presentation and must wait in the hall until the evaluation forms for that presentation have been collected.

In addition to serving as participation/attendance points for presentations days, evaluations are a measure of the extent to which teams aided or impeded classmates' understanding of theoretical concepts, which will factor into the team's presentation grade. Therefore, teams must be sure to understand their theories well before presenting to ensure their classmates gain from the experience.

### **Behavior expectations**

Students are learning to be communication professionals and are expected to model professional behaviors in class and refrain from engaging in non-class-related activities during class time. **Students WILL be asked to leave the class if they are inattentive or disruptive.** Students who are asked to leave will receive a 0 for that day's participation.

### **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 and presentation days (when your team is NOT presenting) are neither excused nor unexcused; students receive one free absence to use at their own discretion over the course of the term for which they will not be penalized. Otherwise, students will receive a 0 for participation on days they are absent. FREE ABSENCES CANNOT BE USED FOR QUIZZES OR YOUR TEAM'S PRESENTATION.

***Tardiness will not be tolerated.*** On lecture days, students who are not seated and ready to begin class by 8 a.m. will have **a letter grade** deducted from the day's participation for each 5 minutes late. (I will round down/up appropriately.) Students who are more than 25 minutes late will receive a 0 for the day.

On quiz days, students who arrive late will not be given extra time to complete the individual quiz and will receive a 0 for the team quiz if they arrive after the individual quizzes have been collected. Students who are tardy on a presentation day will receive points only for the evaluation forms they submit.

### **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 distribution of a revised schedule. Dates of presentations and quizzes are unlikely to change.

Week	Dates	Topics/Class Readings/Due Dates
1	June 2 June 3 June 4 June 5 (Census)	Course Introduction/Defining Communication Understanding, Building and Testing Theories An Early Communication Theory Quiz 1
2	June 9 June 10 June 11 June 12	Theories About Interpersonal Messages Theories About Public Rhetoric Group Presentations Quiz 2
3	June 16 June 17 June 18 June 19	Theories About Relationship Development Theories About Relationship Maintenance Group Presentations Quiz 3
4	June 23 (Last drop) June 24 June 25 June 26	Theories About Media and Culture Theories About Media Effects Group Presentations Quiz 4
5	June 30 July 1 July 2 July 3	Theories About Influence Theories About Gender and Communication Group Presentations Quiz 5

## **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.