COMM 511, Survey of Interpersonal Communication

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Goals of the Course

- survey basic concepts, theories and issues in the study of interpersonal communication
- examine and illustrate methods for studying interpersonal communication
- consider how meaning is assigned during interpersonal communication, including the role of ambiguity, inference, and misunderstanding
- examine multiple, relational functions of communication
- explore the influence of gender
- assess current trends and future directions for interpersonal communication scholarship

Readings

Readings will be available electronically through Mansfield Library Electronic Reserve. Additional readings will be posted over the course of the semester.

Course Requirements

Grades will be assigned according to the +/- system, based on the following assignments.

Class Participation (33%): Most of the learning will take place through reading and discussion, so it is crucial that everyone keep up with the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Bring notes and come ready to ask questions and raise issues. I hope that we will have lively, informed discussions. The key is to have discussion that is informed by the readings and serve to clarify, critique, and extend them, rather than discussion that is based mostly on personal experiences.

Everyone gets one “free-pass.” That is, you are allowed to slack (i.e., read superficially, make especially lame comments, or even skip readings) for one week of your choosing, for whatever reason. Please use it wisely. Note: The free pass does not apply to deadlines on project work.

Thought Papers (33%): You should submit five thought papers over the course of the semester.

These papers should be about 4-5 pages and synthesize and respond to the readings. Each paper should identify and discuss three key ideas in the readings. When discussing each idea, you may: 1) compare and contrast perspectives of different authors; 2) discuss potential implications for research, theory or application; or 3) critique the idea and suggest an alternative.

Also construct three questions for the class to discuss. Questions should be emailed to seminar members and myself by the Friday prior to seminar. Be prepared to lead discussion of these questions and to talk about your written ideas during the seminar.
It is up to you to decide when you will submit a thought paper, as long as you complete five. These must be turned in on the day of class, not afterwards, since they are designed to stimulate discussion.

I’ll grade the thought papers “plus,” “check,” or “minus.” You have the option of rewriting. Papers should be well edited, thoughtful, and show knowledge of the assigned readings. You are not expected to go beyond the assigned readings to support your ideas.

**Research Project/Paper (33%)**: You have the option of either working on a team research project on parent/adolescent communication or writing a paper on a topic of your own choosing.

**Research project option:**

If there is sufficient interest (4 people or more), we will analyze videotapes of parent-adolescent interactions, looking at demand-withdraw patterns and other factors. This would be a secondary analysis of existing data that I collected long ago and haven’t completely analyzed. You will help to formulate hypotheses, code interactions, statistically analyze the data, and write a report for publication. The goal will be to have a completed report by the end of the semester. In the process, you will learn how to work collaboratively, doing a type of communication research (interaction analysis) that is generally too time-consuming for M.A. students to undertake on their own. I will organize, administer, and advise your work on the project. Everyone who participates fully will share authorship of any publication or presentation that comes of it. Your work will be evaluated according to the quality of the finished project, my observations about your contributions, and anonymous peer evaluations.

Since you’ll be working as part of a research team, you’ll need to arrange meetings outside of class – probably weekly meetings and perhaps more when coding the interactions. Individuals or pairs will write drafts of each section of the report, which others (myself included) will critique and edit. We’ll work on data analysis together. I will assist with this and other phases of the project.

**Paper option:**

This can be done alone or in teams so long as the size of the team corresponds to the ambition of the project. I suggest two possibilities, although I will consider other ideas as well. The first is to propose a research project that is grounded in the literature, promises to contribute to it and is feasible. This is a good way to set up an M.A. thesis or other research project that you plan to do later. The second option is to write a synthetic/critical review of the literature that leads to a broader set of research questions and/or hypotheses, without proposing a specific study.

As with any graduate-level paper, the research paper for this seminar should reflect original work and be supported by primary sources from academic journals and books – not popular literature or lower level texts. The topic of the paper should fit within the scope of the seminar. Please talk with me if you are unsure about this. If you choose the paper option, you will submit a proposal early in the semester, so that I can make suggestions. Please talk with me at any time that I can be of assistance in recommending sources or discussing the direction of your paper. I also recommend that you submit a draft late in the semester, in time to receive comments and edit before submitting the final paper. The draft copy should be a good first draft (not a “rough draft”).
Please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition) when writing papers.

### Deadlines

Project work or papers must be completed by Thursday of finals week. There will be other small deadlines for project work throughout the semester. If you choose the paper option, you should submit a brief prospectus (1 page) on the third week of the seminar indicating generally what you plan to do. You will discuss your paper with others in the seminar at our last meeting (Monday of finals week).

### Reading List

#### The Basics

**Basic trends, concepts, and issues**


**Codes, context and meaning**


### Functions of Interpersonal Communication

#### Relationship definition


**Information Management #1**


**Information Management #2**


**Comforting and Support**


**Impression Management**


**Relational Dialectics**


**Intersubjective Understanding**


Sillars, A. L. (2002). *For better or for worse: Re-thinking the role of “misperception” and communication in close relationships and families.* 17th annual B. Aubrey Fisher Memorial Lecture, University of Utah.

**Special Issues**

**Family Interactions**


**Mediated interpersonal communication**


**Sex and gender differences**


**Seminar Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 26</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe. 2</td>
<td>Basic trends, concepts and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe. 9</td>
<td>Codes, context, and meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fe. 16</td>
<td>Presidents’ Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fe. 23</td>
<td>Relationship definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fe. 2</td>
<td>Information management #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 9</td>
<td>Information management #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 16</td>
<td>Impression management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 23</td>
<td>Comforting and support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 30</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ap. 6</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
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<td>Ap. 13</td>
<td>Sex and gender differences</td>
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<td>Ap. 20</td>
<td>Relational dialectics</td>
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<td>Ap. 27</td>
<td>Inter-subjective understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 4</td>
<td>Mediated interpersonal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 11</td>
<td>Discussion of projects and papers (no readings)</td>
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