

CSS 3310: Communication Theory
Spring 2014
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TEXTBOOK:

Griffin, E. (2012). *A first look at communication theory* (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Theories help us to make sense of the world around us. They shape how we understand reality, relationships, circumstances, and decisions in our lives. Some theories are big (think “worldview”) while others are narrower (think particular economic or scientific theories – like the theory of relativity). This course exposes you to theories of communication, both large and small, with the intention of better equipping you to make sense of the communicative aspects of your world. My goal is to help you become a WISER communicator by sharpening your abilities to think about and analyze communication in different ways – in other words, to “think theoretically.”

In this course, you will learn and apply communication theories to your own lives and issues in the world around you. Toward this end, you will:

- Read assigned materials and participate in class discussions to expand your views of communication.
- Write a paper that reviews and applies communication theory/research to a “real world” issue.
- Craft a group presentation that applies your knowledge of theory to the unit case & your lives.
- Demonstrate understanding of course material by taking unit exams.

Unit Cases

In Units 2-4, we will use “cases” to facilitate our discussion of various theories. These cases are documentaries exploring real-life people and issues relevant to the unit at hand. We will begin viewing each documentary together in class, but you will be responsible for viewing the rest of the film on your own BEFORE the next class date. All of the documentaries are available for purchase on either Netflix, Amazon video, or iTunes. Here are your options for watching each film for free:

Unit 2 Case: “Love, Etc.” ~ Dr. McNamee will schedule an out-of-class showing (time/date TBA)

Unit 3 Case: “Survive & Advance” (102 minutes) ~ Available in-full on Vimeo

(<http://vimeo.com/62966564>) or in 2 parts on YouTube (Search “Survive & Advance”)

Unit 4 Case: “The Interrupters” (162 minutes) ~ Available in-full on PBS (broadcast version - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/interrupters/>)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Theory Paper

By the end of the semester, you will write a full-length paper that reviews and applies communication theory and research to a “real life” practical topic or issue. You will review scholarly research on a particular communication theory and apply it to a personally or socially relevant issue or problem. At the mid-point in the semester, we will discuss the specific expectations for this assignment, which is divided into three parts: a paper proposal (25 points), a rough draft (150 points), and a revised final draft (75 points).

Paper Proposal

After discussing the specific expectations of the paper, you will submit a short proposal that answers some preliminary questions about the focus of your research and writing. You cannot change the focus of your paper after submitting this proposal. SUBMISSION FORM: hardcopy in class.

Rough & Final Drafts

After your paper proposal is approved, you will have 1 month to generate a *polished* rough draft that is at least 10 pages in length (plus cover, abstract, and reference list pages – thus, at least 13 pages total). Note, that the rough draft is worth *more* than your final draft, and it should be a professional and complete version of your paper – it is only “rough” in the sense that you will revise it after I critique your writing. In the last week of class, I will return your rough draft, outlining areas that need improvement and attention. Based on this feedback, you will submit a final draft by the final exam date at the end of the course. SUBMISSION FORM: Turnitin and hardcopy (rough draft submitted in class, final draft delivered to my office or mailbox in Castellaw).

Exams

Exams will evaluate your ability to recognize and apply concepts covered during each unit (including assigned readings, class lectures/discussions, and case material). You may complete corrections on the exams for Units 2, 3, and 4 for up to half-credit (e.g., an incorrect 10-point question, if corrected accordingly, can earn you 5 makeup points). All corrections must be completed during my office hours (or by appointment) by the date specified in class when graded exams are returned for first review.

Unit 1 Take Home Exam

At the end of Unit 1, you will take an exam comprised of essays and/or short answer questions. This exam is worth 75 points and will cover: Griffin chapters 2-3, any additional reading handouts, and in-class discussions/illustrations. SUBMISSION FORM: Turnitin and hardcopy in class.

Exams for Units 2-4

There will be exams at the end of Units 2, 3, and 4 each worth 75 points. Exams will cover the assigned readings, lecture discussions, and material from the unit case. Questions may be posed in short answer, true/false, and/or multiple choice format. SUBMISSION FORM: in-class completion.

Class Participation

Active participation in class discussions and activities is critical to your membership in this class. Simply being present in class does not constitute “participation” – rather, participation is defined as actively listening to class discussions, offering thoughtful questions and comments on relevant topics, and refraining from irrelevant and distracting classroom behavior (e.g., texting, preparing for other classes, online activity that is not relevant to the class). Your participation is worth 100 points in the course and is assessed at the end of each unit (i.e., 25 points per unit).

NOTE: You must earn a B in participation for the previous unit (i.e., 20 of 25 points) to be included in the group presentation in the unit to which you’ve been assigned. If you fail to earn 20 points in participation in the previous unit, you will individually write a 10-page paper instead – specific requirements for this alternative assignment will be provided during Unit 2 when we discuss the group presentation.

Group Presentation

Together with classmates, you will deliver a 30-minute presentation that uses a theory or theories from your assigned unit to (a) analyze issues in the unit case and (b) examine an issue of relevance in your lives (worth 175 points). You will be evaluated both individually (50 points) and as an entire group (125 points). Specific expectations for this assignment will be announced at the end of Unit 1. SUBMISSION FORM: In-class delivery, hardcopy of Power Point, and documented evidence of group preparation.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

UNIT 1: Introduction to Communication Theory	
Introduction to Theory	Introduction to course goals & expectations What are communication theories? (Chapter 1)
Objective (Quantitative) Approaches	Objective theories (Chapter 2 & 3 excerpts) Quantitative research and its tie to objective theory (Handout)
Interpretive (Qualitative) Approaches	Interpretive theories (Chapters 2 & 3 excerpts) Qualitative research and its tie to interpretive theory (Handout) Exam review / Discuss & determine groups for unit presentations Unit 1 Take-Home Exam (due Thursday, February 6 ~~ in-class hardcopy & Turnitin submission)
UNIT 2: Relationship Development & Maintenance	
Interpretive Theories	Unit and "Love, Etc." case preview Relational dialectics theory (Chapter 12) Family systems theory ("Interactional View," Chapter 13)
Objective Theories	Uncertainty reduction theory (Chapter 10) Social penetration theory (Chapter 9) Groups 1 & 2 Presentations Unit 2 Exam Discuss Theory Paper Assignment
UNIT 3: Group/Organizational Communication & Persuasion	
Interpretive Theories	Unit and "Survive & Advance" case preview Cultural approach to organizations (Chapter 20) Symbolic convergence theory (Chapter 19) / Paper proposal DUE
Objective Theories	Social judgment theory (Chapter 15) Cognitive dissonance theory (Chapter 17) Groups 3 & 4 Presentations Unit 3 Exam
UNIT 4: Intercultural and Gendered Communication	
Interpretive Theories	Unit and "The Interrupters" case preview Genderlect styles theory (Chapter 34) Standpoint theory (Chapter 35)
Objective Theories	Communication accommodation theory (Chapter 31) / Rough Draft DUE Face negotiation theory (Chapter 32) [rough drafts returned] Groups 3 & 4 Presentations [optional time for paper discussions] Unit 4 Exam administered during final exam periods as follows: ~~ Final drafts DUE at the time of the exam!! ~~