

**COM 303: Relational Communication Theory**  
**Fall 2015**  
**Dr. Robert Sidelinger**  
**Oakland University**

**TEXTBOOKS:**

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (Eds.). (2008). *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*Concise rules of APA style manual* (2009). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:**

This course offers a survey of relational communication theories as they are related to identity formation and the negotiation of close relationships. As a starting point, we focus on the ways in which we come to know and understand the self. Specifically, we determine what factors help us to form a personal identity and how we communicate that identity to others. Then, we turn our attention to theories that explain the development and maintenance of close relationships. We will focus on the ways in which communication works to establish intimacy, to manage tensions, and to terminate personal relationships. By the end of the semester, you should have a working knowledge of the theoretical perspectives that help to characterize the self and to understand the ebb and flow of close personal relationships.

If students listen carefully to lecture, read the assigned readings, and actively participate in class discussion, students should:

- ✓ Become conversant in a range of theories that are central to the field of relational communication;
- ✓ Compare and contrast the intellectual traditions, or paradigms, that ground specific relational theories;
- ✓ Adapt and apply strategies for negotiating, analyzing, and assessing relational communication scholarship; and
- ✓ Apply relational theories to everyday contexts.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Exams (250 points):** Five exams will be given in this course. These are designed to test knowledge and comprehension; therefore, questions require recall and application of material. Questions will cover material from assigned readings and lectures. Each exam will be worth 50 points and consist of objective questions and opened-ended questions. The date for each exam is noted in the course schedule. There will NOT be a comprehensive final exam for this course.

**Attendance (30 points):** Your attendance and verbally responsive participation are

vitaly important to the successful completion of this course and will be recorded at each meeting. Much of the learning involves active participation in class discussions and activities (e.g., writing/reflection exercises). Because your participation in class discussions is essential to your learning, it is imperative that you attend each session. Timely, consistent physical presence for class sessions is a prerequisite for earning a desirable attendance and participation grade. Active participation necessitates your sharing of your insights and your efforts to extend your own and others' learning through mature academic behavior

Because this class meets three a week, you are allotted three absences for the semester. Your absence does not excuse you from assignments that are due or assigned on days that you miss. Extenuating circumstances (documented) will also be taken into account. Please review attendance policies for an OU Excused Absence, the policy can be found at <http://www.oakland.edu/?id=6850&sid=175>. Arriving late or leaving early will result in a reduction in attendance points.

0/3 absences = 30 pts, 4 absences = 20 points, 5 absences = 15 pts, 6 or more absences = 0 pts

**Participation (20 points):** will be evaluated by attendance, degree of preparation for class (including the timely completion of activities/exercises that are to be done outside of class and brought to class on a particular day), demonstrated efforts to learn and understand the material, and constructive input and receptivity to others during class. I will facilitate in-class discussions; it is your responsibility to participate.

This course will be more interesting and beneficial when students participate in discussion. Active participation also helps students develop and refine their communication skills. To be prepared to participate effectively, you must read the chapters prior to the day we talk about them in class. In addition, class discussion benefits when you take the time to come up with relevant examples and questions.

While I encourage open expression of ideas in this class, your freedom to share your thoughts should not infringe on other students' rights to listen, speak, and/or learn. Civility is expected. Please be considerate of others and of your instructor so we can all enjoy a dynamic, engaging, and comfortable environment! See the rubric below for participation (or nonparticipation) guidelines.

	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absent, disruptive, distracted.</li> <li>• Frequently engaged in side conversations.</li> <li>• Spends significant amount of time texting on mobile phone or surfing the Internet.</li> <li>• Arrives late, leaves early, leaves class for extended periods.</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present, not disruptive.</li> <li>• Tries to respond when called on but does not offer much.</li> <li>• Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.</li> <li>• Engages in side conversations and spends time texting and/or surfing the Internet.</li> </ul>

15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic material or reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them.</li> <li>• Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the readings), without elaboration or very infrequently (perhaps once a class).</li> <li>• Does not offer to contribute to discussion, but contributes to a moderate degree when called on.</li> <li>• Demonstrates sporadic involvement (e.g., distracted by side conversations/texting)</li> </ul>
18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates good preparation: knows case or reading facts well, has thought through implications of them.</li> <li>• Offers interpretations and analysis of case material (more than just facts) to class.</li> <li>• Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.</li> <li>• Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.</li> <li>• Courteous and attentive listener.</li> </ul>
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed readings exceptionally well, relating it to readings and other material (e.g., readings, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.).</li> <li>• Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of material.</li> <li>• Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate, etc.</li> <li>• Demonstrates ongoing, very active involvement.</li> <li>• Cooperative, attentive, and courteous (e.g., active listening).</li> </ul>

**Paper 1: Synthesis, Reaction, and Application (10 points)**

You will be responsible for critically reading, analyzing, and processing the chapter reading: Expectancy Violations Theory and Interaction Adaptation Theory, and the EVT journal articles posted in MOODLE. You will write a three to four page paper that demonstrates your full engagement with the readings.

In addition, following the premises of EVT, you will commit the same expectancy violation with two individuals. The type of relationship must be different with each individual (e.g., friend/stranger, family member/friend, co-worker/family member). Include the violation, the context/location, the relationship, and person's reactions. In turn, consider how your activity related/contrasted with the premises of EVT. Be thorough.

You may be asked to discuss your paper in class as part of your participation expectations. You will be graded on your comprehension, synthesis, and critical analysis of the assigned readings, as well as your application of EVT in real life.

**Paper 2: Advice Paper (30 points)**

A primary criticism of interpersonal communication research is that it is shared among

academics in journals and at conferences and does not get translated or distributed in a way that actually helps the people we study. You will need to select a theory from the text that interests you and that you believe others would want advice about based on the existing research that includes the theory. You should write 1000- to 1250-word blog post that summarizes a research area and offers theoretical and evidence-based advice for interpersonal communication. This should be translated research for a general online audience. The advice blog should include at least four scholarly, academic journal sources related to your topic/advice. The hardcopy written versions are due beforehand for critique.

After you received your feedback, convert the scholarly articles into a popular press advice piece for an online audience. The purpose is to translate specialized scientific or technical writing to make it accessible and attractive reading for a non- specialist audience, i.e., to readers outside of the discourse community.

Synthesize the selected articles for your general audience. Pay attention to your opening paragraph ("the lead"), where word choice and sentence progression are important devices to attract and retain readership.

“The most important sentence in any article is the first one. If it doesn't induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead. Also, if the second sentence doesn't induce [the reader] to continue to the third sentence, it's equally dead. Of such a progression of sentences, each tugging the reader forward until [...] safely hooked, a writer constructs that fateful unit: the “lead.”

Choose words carefully, expand text to provide parenthetical or sentence-length definitions of key concepts, but avoid jargon. You may need to use simile or metaphor or words that convey a strong visual connection to things your reader should be expected to be familiar with. You may, for example, compare a computer's CPU to a brain, although I hope you can do better than that in an effort to avoid tired clichés.

Your purpose is to communicate to your readers as human being to human being. Also, consider the title for your piece – it should draw your audience in – make them want to read your article.

Online Blogs: For the online version of the assignment, you need to include (non-copyrighted) images appropriate to the topic, voice, or advice in the blog. E-mail me a link to your online blog before the class meeting that it is due. You may use WordPress or Tumblr. Incorporate links to author bios on faculty webpages or to their Twitter accounts, etc. in your blog post.

**Synthesize the information:**

- What are the results saying about your topic?
- Do the studies agree or disagree?
- How do the studies fit together?
- Give advice that is supported by the research articles
- Put it into your own words; user friendly non-academic speech

### Start Writing

- Show why this topic applies to others
- Use a conversational tone
- Find ways to relate to readers
- End with advice, practical advice
- Cite arguments, findings, definitions, or advice given by others
- Include reference list

### **Paper 3: Theory and Application Paper (50 points)**

Interpersonal theories relate to everyday life, and that life is reflected in the films that we watch. To show that you can apply concepts and ideas from the theories you learn in class, you will write a five to seven page paper (excluding the title page and references) analyzing a movie using concepts and ideas from two to three covered in class. The instructor must approve your selected film beforehand. To complete this assignment, you will apply the selected theories to situations and/or characters in a movie by doing (or not doing) the following:

- Describe the theoretical concepts you are applying to the film in detail.
- Give examples from the movie that illustrate these concepts. Students approach this in different ways. Some points. Other students analyze a specific character or look for scenes that illustrate a specific concept. For example, students have analyzed a character's attachment style, looked for examples of dialectical tensions or uncertainty reduction strategies, and analyzed the ways that nonverbal behaviors are exchanged (e.g., are they reciprocated or not).
- The paper SHOULD NOT contain a detailed synopsis, review, or critique of the film. That is not the point of this assignment. The point is for you to demonstrate your understanding of theory and your ability to apply theoretical concepts to various situations as depicted in a movie. So don't waste space telling me about the movie unless what you are telling me is related to the theory. (I will have seen all the movies on the list anyway.)
- Think analytically about how the theory you are applying describes, predicts, or explains events that happen in the movie. Explain how the theory gave you these insights.
- Although not necessary, some students have discussed how things might have played out differently in the movie if characters had done different things (e.g., used a different uncertainty reduction strategy, done a better job balancing rewards and costs in a relationship). This should not be the main focus on your analysis, but it can be part of your paper.
- Be sure to include references to the theory you are applying and cite that material properly using APA style. Include a minimum of six scholarly sources (excluding the textbook).
- In terms of mechanics, the text of the paper (excluding the title page and reference page) should be 5-7 pages long. All papers should be double-spaced with 1 inch-margins. For consistency in length across papers, please use Times Roman 12-pt. as your font.

The following specific criteria will be used to grade the theory and application papers:

- how well the theoretical concepts are defined and applied
- the degree to which your analysis of the movie reflects a good working knowledge of theory and concepts
- the clarity and creativity of the writing, including how well the paper is written

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Readings (Tentative Schedule)</b>	<b>Assignments/Activities</b>
Week 1	Introduction: Meta-theory and Theory in Interpersonal Communication Research – Chapter 1	
	Introduction: Meta-theory and Theory in Interpersonal Communication Research	
Week 2	Action Assembly Theory – Chapter 2	
	Attribution Theory – Chapter 3	
Week 3	Attribution Theory	
	Imagined Interaction Theory – Chapter 6	
Week 4	Relational Framing Theory – Chapter 8	REVIEW
Week 5		EXAM 1
	Uncertainty Management Theories – Chapter 9	
Week 6	Uncertainty Reduction Theories – Chapter 10	
Week 7	Communication Accommodation Theory – Chapter 12	
Week 8	Expectancy Violations Theory and Interaction Adaptation Theory – Chapter 14	PAPER 1 DUE
		EXAM 2
Week 9	Face Theory – Chapter 15	
	Interpersonal Deception Theory – Chapter 17	
Week 10	Narrative Theories – Chapter 18	
	Politeness Theory – Chapter 19	REVIEW
		EXAM 3
Week 11	Affection Exchange Theory – Chapter 21	FILM APPROVAL DUE
	Attachment Theory – Chapter 22	
	Communication Privacy Management Theory – Chapter 23	
Week 12	Critical Feminist Theories – Chapter 24	PAPER 2 DUE, REVIEW
		EXAM 4
Week 13	Relational Communication Theory – Chapter 25	BLOGS DUE
	Relational Dialectics Theory – Chapter 26	
	Stage Theories of Relationship Development – Chapter 27	
Week 14	Social Exchange Theories – Chapter 28	
	Social Information Processing Theory – Chapter 29	PAPER 3 DUE, REVIEW
Week 15		EXAM 5