

COMS 4410: Communication in the Family  
Spring 2015  
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Ohio University

Textbook:

Segrin, C., & Flora, J. (2011). *Family communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-87634-6

Course Description and Learning Objectives:

Family relationships are the longest-lasting relationships in our lives, and it has been said that no group of people brings us more joy or more pain than our family. We spend a great deal of our lives developing, maintaining, and even terminating, family relationships, and it is through communication that we are able to do so. Therefore, in this class we will focus on the role of communication in a variety of family relationships (e.g., siblings, parent-child) and in a variety of settings (e.g., in times of stress and change, in health conversations, and through social media). As an advanced course, we will focus primarily on theories and research of family communication. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Define and explain basic and advanced terms, principles, and theories of family communication.
- Demonstrate understanding of the following aspects of family relationships, including, but not limited to: family secrets, stories, and rituals; family communication environments and patterns; family communication processes; communication in dating, marital, sibling, extended family, and alternate family forms; and family communication in the context of contemporary issues.
- Read and interpret empirical research articles.
- Recognize family communication in everyday life.
  - Analyze, adjust, and improve their own communication behavior.
  - Critically apply, evaluate, and even develop family communication theories.

Course Requirements:

Your grade is composed of 4 parts: reading reactions, participation, an exam, and two projects.

1. **READING REACTIONS (150 points).** Each week of the semester focuses on a particular aspect of family communication. On Tuesdays we will read a chapter from the textbook and cover major theories, and on Thursdays we will apply the week's theory/concepts to a research article. For Thursday readings:
  - a. You will submit responses to questions about the reading on Blackboard **by 8pm the evening before class (Wednesday)**. This is so I can understand how you processed the reading in preparation for class discussion. Each day's questions are worth 12.5 points (unless the # of days changes, then 150/# of days).
  - b. In addition, you need to bring a printed or electronic version of the reading(s) and your responses to class, preferably with notes written on/with it. This is so you can reference both during our discussion.
2. **PARTICIPATION (50 points).** Your experiences, thoughts, and opinions make this class valuable. It is vital that we all participate in class by asking questions, providing thoughtful insight, and engaging with your classmates in discussion. You can earn up to 50 participation points through in-class discussion. At mid-term, you will be given a grade for participation that can adjust based on your decision to change or maintain your participation in class.

3. **EXAM (200 points).** There is one final exam, and it is worth 200 points. It is an essay exam and will be composed of 4 questions, each worth 50 points. You can expect that these questions will ask you to reflect on your semester of learning in the course and describe, explain, and critique family theory and research. We will discuss possible exam questions closer to the exam. You must bring your Ohio student ID and a pencil to the exam.
4. **A GLIMPSE INTO MY FAMILY: A STORY AND A RITUAL (250 points).** Each of us comes from a family that is made unique by its stories and rituals. For this assignment, you will interview two members of your family (and record this conversation), asking one about a particular family story and the other about a particular family ritual. You will then use these interviews to apply what we have discussed in class about stories and rituals. Your final product will be a paper of 5-7 pages that discusses who you interviewed, what story and ritual was shared, and how ten different concepts apply to the ritual and story (5 each). *The purposes of this assignment are to: 1) practice research skills through interviews, 2) reflect on your family life from another's perspective, and 3) apply theoretical concepts to your family life.*
5. **"TOP FIVE LIST" ABOUT A CONTEMPORARY FAMILY ISSUE (350 points).** Throughout the semester, we will focus on contemporary family issues (e.g., such as the role of technology in the family, health, work/life, violence and abuse, and divorce) and how families navigate them. For this assignment, you will create a BuzzFeed-style top five list about a contemporary family issue that is supported by research. You will choose a topic, research its importance and consequences, and give five recommendations to relevant stakeholders (e.g., families, counselors, schools, program develops). Your final product will be a paper of approximately 3-5 pages (though it's more important that your "top five" are cohesive and well-supported) that uses at least 5 references from peer-reviewed journal articles. A list of topics and further instructions will be provided. *The purposes of this assignment are to: 1) understand a contemporary family issue with greater depth, 2) interpret research about the issue, and 3) craft a succinct list appropriate to your audience, and 4) share this list in a creative and accessible format.*

## Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic	Due Before Class
<b>Unit 1: Family Communication Theories</b>		
Week 1	Introductions; What is a family in today's society? What is a family?	Read: "The American Family..." Chapter 1
Week 2	Theoretical Perspectives Givertz & Segrin (2014)	Chapter 2 Article Reading Response
Week 3	Family Interaction Patterns Fulkerson et al. (2006)	Chapter 3 Article Reading Response
Week 4	Family Interaction Processes Thorson & Kranstuber Horstman (2014)	Chapter 4 Article Reading Response
<b>Unit 2: Families and Family Relationships</b>		
Week 5	Courtship and Mate Selection Eaton & Rose (2011)	Chapter 5 Article Reading Response
Week 6	Marriage and Intimate Partnerships Lannutti (2013)	Chapter 6 Article Reading Response
Week 7	Parent-Child Communication Ebersole et al. (2014)	Chapter 7 Article Reading Response; <b>A Glimpse into My Family Project Due</b>
Week 8	Sibling Communication Mikkelson et al. (2011)	Chapter 8 Article Reading Response
Week 9	Extended Family Relationships Adoptive Families – Suter & Ballard (2009)	Chapter 9 Article Reading Response
<b>Unit 3: Family Communication and Modern Family Life</b>		
Week 10	Divorce Afifi & Keith (2004)	Chapter 12 Article Reading Response
Week 11	Remarriage and Stepfamilies Koenig Kellas et al. (2014)	Chapter 13 Article Reading Response
Week 12	Mental Health Families and Technology Child - Westerman (2013)	Chapter 14 Article Reading Response
Week 13	Physical Health Families and Work - Medved et al. (2006)	Chapter 15 Article Reading Response
Week 14	Violence and Abuse Top Five List Presentations	Chapter 16 <b>Top Five List Project Due</b>
Finals	<b>Final Exam Period - Exam 3</b>	