

COMM 5391-01

Marriage and Family Communication

Fall 2017

Professor: Melinda R. Weathers, Ph.D.

Office: DRCB 322E

Office Hours: T/TH, 11:00am-12:00pm & 2:00-3:00pm,
or by appointment

Location: Online

E-mail: mweathers@shsu.edu

Phone: 936.294.1848 (email is best)

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description:

This course begins with the understanding that the family is our initial communicative unit. Family shapes our identities, self-concepts, self-esteem, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Furthermore, marital and family experiences affect how we communicate with others, how we react to our communicative environment, and how we present ourselves to others.

Marriage and family continue to be a current issue in the media, politics, pop culture, and higher education. What “family” means has continued to change, and there are emerging new forms, meanings, and expectations. Learning about marital and family communication can increase your self-awareness, tolerance, and even appreciation of others and the complexities of one of our most fundamental life experiences.

This course is designed as an introduction to communication phenomena in the setting of marriage and family. The overall goal is it help you understand how we develop, maintain, enhance, or disturb family relationships through communication. You will learn verbal and nonverbal skills, which can help promote healthy family and marital communication. This course will explore the diversity of marital and family situations and systems that we encounter every day. We will review the major theories, concepts, and research findings in family communication. This course will provide the vocabulary necessary to discuss marital and family communication matters in scientific terms and will expose students to a variety of approaches to the study of marital and family communication.



Course Objectives:

These are the objectives I hope you accomplish in this course:

- ☐ To understand and appreciate one's own marital and family structure, values, development, communication patterns, rules, norms, and hierarchies.
- ☐ To become more comfortable with and have more control over one's own personal situations and more competent in skills related to communication in the family.
- ☐ To develop multiple communication strategies concerning marital and family negotiations, lifestyles, ongoing situations, and daily interactions.
- ☐ To increase awareness of various options concerning marital and family dynamics and become more accepting of other's choices.
- ☐ To be able to apply and incorporate theoretical perspectives and scientific/scholarly observations regarding marital and family dynamics.

TEXTBOOKS

Required Material: The following books are required and may be available at the University Bookstore. Most online retailers also sell these books.

- Turner, L. H., & West, R. (2018). *Perspectives on Family Communication* (5th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Suggested Material: I also strongly encourage every graduate student to purchase the following book; it is very helpful for learning how to properly cite your work in APA style.

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Blackboard Material: Blackboard includes dozens of project documents, PowerPoints, bibliographies, and articles you may use for this class. We will not go over every document that is posted on Blackboard, but it will substantially increase your learning and progress on the nature of family communication if you take time to go through the relevant documents provided.

Lecture Materials: Each week I will release/post course material on Sunday (this will be the beginning of our class week). All assignments for the week will be due by Saturday at 11:59pm (this will be the end of our class week). You are to review the materials; it is your responsibility to retrieve the course material and any other materials that I post to our Blackboard page.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

Your course grade will be determined from the number of points you earn over the course of the semester. Assignments are due on the date listed in the course schedule. No late work!

Final Course Grades, *450 total points*

- A. 405+ points
- B. 404-360 points
- C. 359-315 points
- D. 314-270 points
- F. < 269 points

Assignment Points

- | | |
|---|------------|
| □ Syllabus Acceptance | 10 points |
| □ Written Self-Introduction | 15 points |
| □ Quizzes (10 x 10 points each) | 100 points |
| □ Activities (3 x 50 points each) | 150 points |
| □ Discussion Boards (5 x 15 points each) | 75 points |
| □ Chapter Summary Forms (10 x 10 points each) | 100 points |

Interpret letter grades on assignments and for the course according to this rubric:

- A. *Excellent*. The student's work and contributions to the class are exemplary.
- B. *Very Good or Above Average*. The student's work and contributions to the class are consistently and remarkably strong.
- C. *Acceptable or Average*. The student's work meets and sometimes exceeds expectations for graduate performance in courses of this nature.
- D. *Problematic or Below Average*. The student's work may sometimes meet expectations for graduate performance in courses of this nature, but is sometimes deficient or flawed.
- F. *Failing*. The student's work does not meet the expectations for graduate performance in courses of this nature.

Syllabus Acceptance: The Syllabus Acceptance form is located on Blackboard. Fill it out and submit to the corresponding *assignment link* on Blackboard. In doing so, you are acknowledging that you have received and thoroughly reviewed the syllabus.

Written Self-Introduction: Submit to the corresponding *forum* on Blackboard.

Tell us your name, where you are from (and where you are currently living, if different), and three things about yourself that we would not know if we saw you (e.g., “I have brown hair” is not deep enough. Give us something to remember you by). Tell us why you took this online class, your focus of study, and your job/career/area of expertise. Then tell us about an important person in your life – this is a relational communication course, so give us some insight into the relationship that you share with this person. After your initial post, you should respond to at least two classmates to make them feel welcome.

Quizzes: Instead of tests, there will be weekly quizzes. There will be ten (10) quizzes given during the semester. Each quiz will cover readings assigned for that week. Each quiz will be timed (15 minutes) and consist of 10 multiple-choice, true/false, and/or short answer questions.

Activities: There will be three (3) activities assigned during the semester. Each activity will correspond to the previous week’s readings. On weeks where an activity is due, there will be no other assignments. The three activities include: (1) Genogram Project, (2) Documentary Reflection Paper, and (3) Application Paper. Each activity will be accompanied by a short reflection paper. These activities will be described in detail on Blackboard; due dates are listed in the course schedule.

Online Discussion Board Participation: Students are expected to maintain regular activity on our class discussion boards. There will be five (5) discussion boards dedicated to various family communication topics over the course of the semester. Each week, students are expected to post questions to their classmates, answer any questions posted by me and/or your classmates, comment on the theories under discussion, and generally, foster meaningful dialogue (on a regular basis) with each other.

You are required to visit the course discussion boards at least twice a week and make at least three different posts (please feel free to post more, in fact I encourage you to post often). You can respond to the lecture, readings, discussion leader questions, or to a student’s comments, concerns, and/or arguments. You should include at least 150 words in one of your responses with follow-up responses having at least 75 words. To earn credit for your posts, you cannot simply agree or disagree with a comment. You must make a coherent argument/comment when you post to the discussion board. For the best posts and one way to add to the discussion in your post is to bring in current events or a research article you may find pertaining to the topic (*hint, hint* – support your arguments/claims/comments with research or concepts from the book. If you find outside research or a good example of a concept in current events, you should add the link when you make the post).

In addition, one of your posts should be spaced 24 hours apart from the others. I do not want all your posts on the same day. I also do not want all your posts on the last day of the week. There is no way a discussion can happen if you wait until the last day to post. You have until Saturday at 11:59pm to make your posts for each week. After that time, I will not read/grade any posts from the following week.

Helpful hints:

o Make three posts

o Make at least one post before Wednesday (at least 150 words)

o Make at least two other posts before Saturday at 11:59pm (at least 75 words)

o Be coherent, thoughtful, and interesting in your posts

You are in control of how much you share about your own family experiences. You do not have to self-disclose if you do not want to. Your grade does not depend on revealing personal material. You can always opt to apply the theory to fictional families or other families you have observed if you do not wish to talk about your own family.

Your contributions to the class will increase the understanding and retention of the class material for you and your classmates. As such, I will monitor everyone's posts. I do not respond to discussions unless it is absolutely necessary. I have found that students discuss more thoroughly if I stay out of the discussion. Remember, I will monitor both the quality and quantity of your posts.

Chapter Summary Forms: For each chapter (10), students are required to fill out a Chapter Summary Form. For each week's readings, you will summarize relevant theories, including the theorists, key claims or propositions, and significance. In addition, you are also required to come up with two (2) discussion questions or quotes associated with that week's content (e.g., theory or topic area). The question may challenge the theory/topic, seek clarifications, connect it with other theories/topics, or apply it to different scenarios. The quote should be something that you either really like, really disagree with, or do not understand. You should also respond to each question or quote that you pose. Include at least 3-5 sentences to explain why you selected the question or quote.

Chapter Summary Forms should be thorough, but should only contain the main points, ideas, and concepts presented in each chapter. Please try to keep your Chapter Summary Form under two (2) pages in length. For this assignment **ONLY**, please single-space your work. Submit to the corresponding *assignment links* on Blackboard.

COURSE POLICIES

Expectations:

- ☐ Students are expected to *attend* every class session for every class they are enrolled in.
- ☐ The attendance policy reflects the "real world" expectations of the working world. You need to be responsible and accountable for your actions. Students must demonstrate personal responsibility and accountability.
- ☐ Your participation is an integral part of this course therefore; you are expected to come to class prepared to participate in group interactions and discussions with an understanding of the material due that session.
- ☐ Failure to adhere to these expectations will be reflected in your total grade, and/or referral to the Dean for disciplinary action.

Classroom Policies:

- ☐ Attendance: Participation points will be based on your class attendance and participation. Following the College's policy, I expect you to be in class. Absence in an **online course** is defined as the lack of an active post or submission within the course including discussion forums, written assignments, and tests/quizzes. This standard will be used to determine all absentee issues, including but not limited to last date of attendance and involuntary withdrawal from a course due to absences. For online classes, to be considered as "showing up the first day" you must, on the first day, do something meaningful in the online Blackboard site (i.e., Syllabus Acceptance assignment). Once you've logged in for the first day, your attendance will be taken at each assignment. If you do each assignment on time, you'll get credit for attending. Although some weeks have more than one assignment, attendance will be taken just once for the week. Each week in which a student does not complete at least one activity (i.e., has no online presence) will be counted as an absence and **10 points will be docked from his/her FINAL course grade**. If you miss more than three weeks of assignments, you will be dropped from the course. *It is critical that you stay in touch with me by phone or e-mail when you are experiencing illness or difficulty. If you wait until your problems are over to*

talk to me, I may have no option but to fail you based on course policies. This is a communication course; communicate to me to discuss options.

- ❑ **Missing Class and Assignments:** YOU are responsible for your accountability to this class. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining pertinent information and for finding out what you missed. YOU must obtain this information prior to the next class. If you miss any in-class assignments/activities, you will receive a ZERO. No late, make-up, or extra credit work will be given or accepted for credit. **Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in the course schedule.**
- ❑ **Written Assignments:** All written assignments are to be typed in *Times New Roman, 12-point font*, and must be *double-spaced*. Written assignments should be in formal English and polished (i.e., grammatically correct). It should read like the intelligent college-level student that you are! Part of creating a message as a communicator is doing so in both oral and written avenues. All assignments must be full and complete analyses of the content assigned. All assignments will be submitted as *Word documents (.doc)* through Blackboard and are due on the date listed in the course schedule. **No late assignments will be accepted.**
- ❑ **Citing Sources:** Any assignment in which you must cite sources must include a reference page at the end, listing all cited sources. All sources must be cited according to the American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition style guide. The Internet, although the greatest thing ever invented, will not be the only source you'll use for your research. **Go the library and find scholarly research articles!**
- ❑ **Grading Timelines and Grade Challenges:** You can expect assignments to be graded within 72 hours after the deadline. I am happy to discuss your grade with you **up to one week after the grade is given**. However, after this point, no alterations will be made. Thus, please do not email me when final grades are posted asking for your grade to be increased.

Behavior:

- ❑ You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in group interactions and discussions with an understanding of the material due that session.
- ❑ You are expected to be **considerate and constructive** when providing feedback to class members and to the instructor on issues and/or assignments.
- ❑ You are expected to give this class your utmost professional attitude.
- ❑ You are expected to share relevant comments, opinions, ideas, and experiences.
- ❑ **Rude behavior will not be tolerated** should you demonstrate rude and unprofessional behavior in class you will be asked to leave the class.

Online Classes and Netiquette: Netiquette or Network Etiquette is a set of rules for behaving properly online. When you enter any new culture, you are liable to commit a few social blunders. You might offend people without meaning to, or you might misunderstand what others say and take offence when it is not intended. Here are some guidelines for proper behavior in an online course:

- ❑ Avoid using derogatory, obscene, or inappropriate language.
- ❑ Use emoticons to smooth online communication. :-)
- ❑ Don't SHOUT. Use of all capital letters indicates shouting.
- ❑ Avoid grammatical and spelling errors by using spelling and grammar check tools when available.
- ❑ Keep your posts on-topic and in the proper forum. Keeping message on topic will help with the organization and readability.

Just because this is an online course does not mean you should type carelessly. Please use formal grammar in the forums and discussion boards and engage with your classmates' work in a professional manner.

Late Work: NO make-up work will be accepted. This is not negotiable. Missed work will receive a ZERO.

Email Accounts: Students must activate their SHSU email accounts to receive important messages related to this class. This is the only email account I will use to contact you. Make sure it's activated and you know how to use it!

Technology: Online classes require that you be diligent. It is easy to put off doing assignments until the last minute. I will not accept Internet outages, power outages, or other electronic/technological issues as acceptable reasons for not meeting assignment deadlines. Please plan in advance for emergencies and power/Internet outages.

Consultations: On the Blackboard site for this class, I have created a Q&A forum. Please use it! I encourage everyone to submit questions and respond to each other's questions/concerns about the class. Your classmates are an invaluable resource, even if they are scattered throughout the community and not sitting next to you on campus.

That being said, you can always email if you have questions about what's going on in the class. However, because I value your time and my time, I request that you follow this simple format: Use your SHSU account. Have the subject line be a clear indication of the subject of the email. Sign the email with your full name. These small yet crucial steps will help me answer your question and identify you in a timely manner.

UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE POLICIES

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism/Cheating): The University expects all students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary actions. No student shall engage in behavior that, in the judgment of the instructor, may be construed as cheating. This may include, but is not limited to, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty such as the acquisition without permission of tests or other academic materials and/or distribution of these materials and other academic work. This includes students who aid and abet as well as those who attempt such behavior. For more information, visit www.shsu.edu/syllabus/

When you use any source for information in your research, you must give credit for the information, both visual and textual, to the author or creator, both in-text and on the reference page.

If caught, a student will receive a ZERO for any assignment on which they plagiarized or failed to document ethically according to college and professional standards or cheated. The student will be referred to the Dean for disciplinary action. This may include receiving an "F" for the course.

Reasonable Accommodations: It is the policy of SHSU that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (936.294.3512; disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may adversely affect your work in this class, I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to let me know during the first week of class if you will need accommodations. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential.

NOTE: No accommodations can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For more information, visit: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/disability/index.html>

Observance of Religious Holiday: Colleges and universities must recognize the mandatory observance of religious holy days for students. The university must permit students to celebrate religious holy days, including travel for the same purpose. Please notify the instructor in writing of any observed religious holidays during the course of the semester. The instructor will not only excuse absences resulting from religious holiday observances, but will also allow students to make up examinations and assignments. I need in writing from students their intention to miss class for the purpose of holy day observances prior to the planned absence.

Visitors in the Classroom: Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

Tentative Schedule
(subject to change, if necessary)

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in this course schedule.

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>DUE DATE</u>
Week 1	Aug. 26
<u>Readings</u> Syllabus	
<u>Assignments</u> Syllabus Acceptance Written Self-Introduction	
<hr/>	
Week 2	Sep. 2
<u>Readings</u> Providing Definitions	Chapter 1
<u>Assignments</u> Chapter Summary Form Quiz #1 Discussion Board #1	
<hr/>	
Week 3	Sep. 9
<u>Readings</u> Providing Theoretical Frameworks	Chapter 2
<u>Assignments</u> Chapter Summary Form Quiz #2	
<hr/>	
Week 4	Sep. 16
<u>Readings</u> Telling Stories and Making Meaning	Chapter 6
<u>Assignments</u> Chapter Summary Form Quiz #3 Discussion Board #2	
<hr/>	
Week 5	Sep. 23
<u>Readings</u> Examining Structure: Roles and Rules	Chapter 3
<u>Assignments</u> Chapter Summary Form Quiz #4	
<hr/>	

Week 6**Sep. 30**Readings

Genogram Discussion

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMoLjEOzfk>Assignments

Genogram Project

Week 7**Oct. 7**Readings

Expressing Conflict, Power, and Violence

Chapter 7

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #5

Discussion Board #3

Week 8**Oct. 14**Readings

Communicating Intimacy

Chapter 5

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #6

Week 9**Oct. 21**Readings

Communicating Under Stress

Chapter 8

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #7

Discussion Board #4

Week 10**Oct. 28**Readings

Social Context for Family Communication

Chapter 4

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #8

Week 11**Nov. 4**Readings

Documentary: Two American Families (about 90 minutes in length)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/two-american-families/>Assignments

Documentary Reflection Paper

Week 12**Nov. 11**Readings

Challenging Dialogues in the Family

Chapter 9

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #9

Discussion Board #5

Week 13**Nov. 18**Readings

Concluding Perspectives on Family Communication

Chapter 10

Assignments

Chapter Summary Form

Quiz #10

Week 14**Nov. 25****Fall Break**

Week 15**Dec. 2**Readings

Clip from Mad Men

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItMxcOTzvNk>

Clip from The Kids Are Alright

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpSG554L8Qs>

Clip from Crazy Stupid Love

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFrWPOftuMs>

Clip from Pursuit of Happiness

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvtxOzO6OAE>

Clip from Modern Family

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aSzTVrP5FQ>Assignments

Application Paper