

COMS 4387.01: Relationship Communication Syllabus, Spring 2018

Course Description

This course explores communication as it occurs in various types of personal relationships, with a special focus on romantic relationships and close friendships. Emerging contexts for such relationships, such as long-distance and mediated forms, are included, as are suggestions for enhancing the quality of communication and satisfaction with them. Prerequisite: Sophomore standing. Credit 3.

Class Meeting Time and Place

The class meets in the Dan Rather Communications Building, Room 312, from 11:00 – 11:50 a.m. MWF.

Instructor

Dr. Richard Bello

Office: 290F College of Humanities and Social Sciences Building (CHSS)

Office Hours: 10:00 – 11:00 TTh; also by appointment

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Course Objectives for Students

- To demonstrate understanding of research and theories comprising current literature on communication in interpersonal relationships.
- To explain the role that communication plays in relationships as they occur in various social and cultural contexts.
- To create strategies that can be applied to real-life personal and other relationships.
- To analyze information about relational communication to produce a term paper that reviews scholarly literature.

Required Textbook

Knapp, M. L., Vangelisti, A. L., & Caughlin, J. P. (2014). *Interpersonal communication and human relationships* (7th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. ISBN: 978-0-205-

00608-3

This required reading will serve as both a basis of classroom lectures and discussions as well as a supplement to them. Do not always expect an *exact* relationship between what goes on in class and what you read in the book, but do note carefully the reading assignments on the course outline that follows.

Class Meetings and Attendance

If poor attendance prevents you from being exposed to theory and research about relationship communication through classroom lectures, discussions, and exercises, then it is difficult to develop the understanding necessary to truly improve your ability to analyze and apply the materials to your and others' relationships. In addition, your participation in class discussions is an aid to improving your fellow classmates' understanding.

Therefore, attendance is so important that students who accumulate four unexcused absences will have their class participation grades lowered by one letter grade. In addition, for every unexcused absence beyond four, class participation will be lowered another letter grade.

Class Procedure

The class roll will be called promptly at the start of every class period, so students are expected to be on time. A variety of methods will be used to conduct class, including lecture, informal student discussions, and more formal classroom exercises. These exercises are experimental in nature, designed to test or demonstrate concepts raised in discussions and lectures and to stimulate thinking about relationship communication. Plenty of opportunity will be given for students to ask questions about material encountered in class or read in the textbook.

Exams, Projects, and Grading Policy

The final grade will be based primarily on three major exams, with the possibility of a few announced and unannounced quizzes. These exams and quizzes will count for 65% of the final grade.

Also significant to your grade will be a major writing project related to some aspect of relationship communication. There are **two alternatives** from which you can choose for this project. The first is a literature review of several scholarly articles about a topic directly related to communication in relationships. These articles must be pieces of original research that appear in scholarly journals related to human communication. A certain number of articles (about 10) will be required, although more than that minimum is often helpful to the quality of the paper and to the grade. The second alternative is an analysis of an actual new and developing relationship between you and someone else. You will be given requirements for the kind of person and relationship you may choose for this project. Meet at least once a week with this person, starting at the beginning of the semester, and keep a detailed journal in which you summarize and discuss these interactions. Then, using this material and material from the textbook, along with a minimum number of scholarly articles (about 4 to 5), write a term paper about this developing relationship. The idea is to use the textbook and scholarly articles to shed light on and analyze the relationship's communication.

If time allows, students will be required to present the basic findings of their research papers to the class. Whichever of these writing projects you choose will count for 25% of the final grade.

Class participation counts for 10% of the final grade, and includes the following: 1) satisfactory completion of several short "reaction papers" dealing with assigned activities or discussions about key concepts conducted in class; 2) prompt and regular attendance; 3) your involvement in class discussions and exercises; 4) adherence to all general class policies detailed below.

General Class Policies

A. Be on time. If you arrive **after the roll is called** or **leave early**, you are considered absent. If you happen to arrive late, see me after class so that the absence can be changed to a tardy (three such tardies count as one absence). Student Absences on Religious Holy Days: Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work.

B. Don't "leave" early, that is, pack up books, stand up, etc. near the end of class. The class period is over when the allotted time is *completely* up or when the instructor dismisses class.

C. In class, **turn off or silence** all cell phones, iPods, iPads, Blackberries, or other electronic communication devices and **put them away**. Use of laptop computers in the classroom is allowed only for the purpose of taking lecture notes.

D. Listen carefully as well as courteously and take thorough notes. Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat other students and faculty with respect. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.

E. Arrive to class rested and ready to participate. Be open and receptive to new ideas--you will hear a lot of them this semester. Questioning your assumptions is the basis of learning.

F. Written assignments will be accepted up to one class period after they are originally due. However, such late assignments will be given less than full credit. No assignments will be accepted more than one class period after the due date, except in the most extenuating of circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor. Exam makeups and late papers will be allowed with no penalty only if the student can present evidence of a legitimate reason for having missed the due date. These reasons are: illness requiring a doctor's visit, required presence in court or other legal proceedings, and death in the immediate family. Students who miss exams or papers without a legitimate, documented reason will receive a zero on these assignments unless, at the discretion of the instructor, circumstances warrant a makeup penalized by at least one letter grade.

G. Plagiarism or cheating on exams will result, at a minimum, in a zero for those assignments. In addition, depending on the circumstances, the instructor will consider reporting the case to the student's academic dean for further disciplinary action or assigning a failing grade for the course. Any available means for detecting plagiarism of papers will be used, including electronic services such as Turnitin.

H. If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, please contact the Chair of the Committee for Continuing Assistance for Disabled Students at 294-1720.

I. The policy on visitors in the classroom is as follows: “Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office” (SHSU website).

J. The new policy allowing concealed carrying of handguns on campus, including answers to many of the questions you might have, can be found here:

<http://www.shsu.edu/katsafe/campus-carry/>

You will find a more detailed description of these policies at <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Course Outline

1st Week: Introduction to Course and Relationship Communication (Chapter 1)

- A. Levels of Communication
- B. Communication Changes in Relationships
- C. Communication Patterns in Relationships

2nd Week: Introduction (cont.) and Relationship Stages (Chapters 1 & 2)

- A. Stages of Development and Coming Apart
- B. Role of Dialectical Theory
- C. Role of Social Exchange Theories

3rd Week: Factors Affecting Relationship Communication: The Nature of Communicators (Chapter 3)

- A. A Needs Perspective
- B. Our Needs and Others' Needs
- C. Gender and Needs

4th Week: Factors Affecting Relationship Communication: The Environment (Chapter 4)

- A. Culture
- B. Physical Environment
- C. New Technologies

Exam #1

5th Week: The Beginnings of Dialogue (Chapter 5)

- A. Why Bother?
- B. Forming Perceptions of Others
- C. Factors of Attraction

6th & 7th Weeks: Interaction Rules and Rituals (Chapter 6)

- A. Communication Rules and Their Violation
- B. Greeting and Addressing Others
- C. The Importance of Small Talk

8th Week: More Intimate Dialogue (Chapter 7)

- A. Liking or Loving? Love or Friendship?
- B. Love Types
- C. The Nature of Intimacy and Its Foundations

9th Week: Spring Break

10th Week: Communicating to Maintain Relationships, Part One (Chapter 8)

- A. Self-Disclosure, Trust, and Lying
- B. Fighting Fair

Exam #2

11th Week: Communicating to Maintain Relationships, Part Two (Chapter 9)

- A. Communication and Commitment
- B. Communication Associated with Increased Intimacy (e.g., Personal Idioms)

Good Friday: March 30th.

12th Week: Terminating Relationships (Chapter 10)

- A. Reasons
- B. Types of Termination
- C. Communication During Relationship Decay

Last Day to Drop Classes: Friday, April 6th.

13th Week: Destructive Dialogue (Chapter 11)

- A. How Communication Can Lead to Division
- B. Some Destructive Communication Patterns

14th & 15th Weeks: More Effective Relationship Communication (Chapter 12)

- A. Relativity of Effective Communication
- B. Perceptions of Effective Communication
- C. Pathways to More Effective Relationship Communication

16th Week: Project Presentations

Last Class Day and Last Day to Resign: Friday, May 4th.

17th Week: **Exam #3**