COM 710 Sample Syllabus

Survey of Communication Theory

Required text and course materials

Canvas/WebCampus (https://unlv.instructure.com/login/canvas). Some readings & related readings will be available here.

Course readings available through WebCampus and UNLV Libraries

Other useful, optional resources:

Course overview

Course description
Regardless of your intentions for your MA degree, strong knowledge of theory is a necessary component to graduate work. Thus, the purpose COM 710 is to introduce you to theory broadly and communication theories from a breadth of meta-theoretical perspectives. The end result of this course is an increased ability to use communication theory to inform and guide research and to ask critical questions regarding theory.

Course goals & learning objectives
By the end of this course, I expect you to:
1. Define communication theory;
2. Explain the 3 primary metatheoretical paradigms, their assumptions, be able to situate theories according to their meta-theoretical assumptions, and discuss what the underlying meta-theoretical assumptions mean for the theory;
3. Critique theories according to their appropriate criteria;
4. Understand, explain, and use communication theories to guide and inform scholarship and knowledge about human communication;
5. Develop your critical thinking, analytical, integration, and writing skills.

Successful completion of this course will aid your achievement of the Learning Objectives for an MA in Communication Studies, including:
a. Define communication in interpersonal contexts;
b. Analyze and evaluate messages and interaction;
c. Recognize and explain self-reflexivity in human communication;
d. Read critically and analyze productively published research articles;
e. Recognize and explain multiple perspectives in human communication theory; and
f. Identify and assess features of ethical and unethical human communication.
**Course prerequisites**
You must be of graduate standing (or have permission of the course instructor). Access to computers, email, WebCampus, and UNLV library are necessary.

**Course policies & procedures**

**Course expectations**
Class time will consist of lectures, discussions, and presentations. These will be based on the readings and out-of-class assignments you prepare prior to class attendance. Your success and the success of this course depend on your preparation and participation. Therefore, I expect you to be actively engaged throughout class time. You are responsible for all information covered in class and readings.

The subject matter of this course can be complex and challenging. Therefore, it is essential that you provide feedback, ask questions, and be involved in discussions in order to indicate what you are struggling with, test your understanding, and obtain additional information and clarification. This will provide a more rewarding experience for everyone. This course may be rigorous and time consuming for many students. It is vital that you keep up with readings, assignments, lectures, and contribute to class discussions in productive ways.

- The best way to make sure you understand material is to participate in discussions and come to class prepared. Participation does not mean talking a lot. Instead, providing valuable insights and helping others do the same is necessary for participation. Participation also includes being polite, courteous, and respectful in your responses to others’ ideas. Any time you have concerns or questions about someone’s conduct in class, or if you have other issues you would like to discuss, please contact me.
- Because we will have open discussions of ideas, please respect one another’s privacy by keeping that information to yourself unless the individual says explicitly that you may share that personal information with others. There is one exception to this rule: If you reveal that you are a danger to yourself or others, or if you reveal someone else is a danger to themselves or others, I must report that to authorities.
- Arrive to class on time. Missing even small portions of class is unacceptable in graduate school. Also, it hampers your opportunity to learn and interrupts others’ ability to concentrate.
- Electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, recording devices, other potentially disruptive devices) are permitted only with the prior explicit consent of your professor. Your professor may rescind permission at any time during the course.
  - Here is what I provide consent for: You may use your computer or tablet in class. However, if at any time your technology use becomes a distraction to you, your peers, or to me, you will be asked to put it way and may lose the privilege to have electronic devices in class.
  - Here is what I do not provide consent for: Cell phones are not permitted. If there is an emergency and you are expecting a phone call (e.g., your dog is having surgery), notify your professor at the beginning of class. Otherwise, all phone calls may be answered or text messages responded to by your professor. Turn off your phone and put it out of eye sight during class. You may not take pictures, video or audio record, or otherwise record this course (in part or whole). Not only can this be disruptive, but it violates the privacy of everyone in the classroom.
- This classroom is not a charging station. Cords are a safety hazard in the classroom. If you must have your electronics plugged in, sit next to an outlet and do not have the cord where others walk. (read: I can be a clutz and may trip on and/or break your phone or computer if it is connected to a cord on the floor).
- The more you expose yourself to research, the more you understand and appreciate theory and research. Therefore, Research Brown Bags, GUA College Colloquia, the GUA Scholar Series presentations and other research presentations across campus are encouraged.
Attendance
Class attendance is mandatory. A missed class will have detrimental consequences on your final grade (1/2 a letter grade deduction will be taken for each day missed [a 3.5 will become a 3.0]). Tardiness is equally unacceptable. A late arrival and/or leaving class early (regardless of how late or early) is the same as an absence. This holds for mid-class session breaks. Should you miss class, it is your responsibility to notify your professor and to obtain the information missed from a class member. Contact me as soon as possible when unusual circumstances arise or are anticipated.

Late work and incompletes
All work is due at the time and date specified on the course schedule. Additional time will not be provided. Late work is not accepted. Incompletes will not be awarded (except in extreme circumstances). An inherent part of any course is to prepare you for life circumstances outside the student role (e.g., convention presentations, future graduate work, and professional employment). Late submissions, if accepted, will result in a substantial grade deduction (10% per day, not class period). If you arrive late for the exams (or log in late for the exams), you have only the remaining time to complete the exam.

Written work
Unless otherwise stated, all written work must be submitted as a .doc or .docx and follow APA 6th edition standards for formatting and citations (we will learn the 7th edition together when it is released). Work submitted in any other format will be not be graded. Work must be uploaded to the appropriate Canvas assignment by the time specified on the syllabus. Exams and the final paper must be submitted to Canvas. If an assignment is submitted in the wrong box, via email, or any other method, it will be considered “not submitted”.

University policies, procedures, & resources
For a full list of UNLV policies updated by term please click here. Specific policies are also noted below.

Academic conduct
Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution. See the Student Academic Misconduct Policy.

- Academic misconduct may include, but is not limited to: plagiarizing, “cut and copy”-ing from original work, cheating on an examination, stealing or having unauthorized possession of examinations, substituting one person for another at an examination, submitting another person’s work, submitting your own work that you submitted in another course, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, falsifying data, fabricating citations, and tampering with the academic work of others.
- All work submitted this course must be your original work for this course, this semester.
- If you have questions about source use and citations, speak with me prior to the deadline.

Copyright
UNLV requires all members of the University community to familiarize themselves and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. UNLV will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student
violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies.

**Title IX**
Title IX maintains that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race, national origin, etc.). Offenses may take place on or off campus with university affiliated individuals. If you (or someone you know) feel your ability or opportunity to a fair and equitable educational experience is being interfered with, please speak with someone. UNLV Title IX resources make several resources available, and you may talk with a Title IX Coordinator.

**Canvas/WebCampus**
WebCampus is an integral part of this course. Several assigned readings, submission of most assignments, grades, email, and other materials for this course will be accessible only via WebCampus. If you do not have access or are unfamiliar with it, contact the Student Help Desk in SU 231 at (702) 895-0761 or e-mail.

**Email & Rebelmail**
I typically email via WebCampus. Most emails will be automatically send to your Rebelmail. E-mail is appropriate for brief questions that need short responses. I check email between 9:00am and 5:00pm Monday through Friday. I make every effort to respond to email within 24 hours, but because some email responses need a little thought and consideration, I do not guarantee a response in 24 hours.

By policy, UNLV faculty and staff should e-mail students’ Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communications (e.g., information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements). All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. I recommend checking your Rebelmail once a day to receive all course, college, and university messages in a timely manner.

**Disability Resource Center (DRC)**
The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to me during office hours so that we may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain confidentiality, do not approach me during class to discuss your accommodation needs.

**UNLV Libraries**
Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. For this class, the subject librarian is Susie Skarl. UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students’ access to information. Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and successful post-college life.

**UNLV Writing Center**
One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center.

**Tutoring and Coaching**
The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring, academic success coaching and other academic assistance for UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, visit or call 702-895-3177.

Transparency in Learning & Teaching
The University encourages students to use a transparency template to discuss with their instructors how assignments and course activities benefit student success.

Assignments
Theory Application presentations (10%)
Each week we will have student presentations that summarize a research study (not in the syllabus) that use one of the theories discussed that week in class. Presentations should improve everyone’s understanding of the theory by (a) briefly summarizing the research study including the context and phenomenon studied, (b) what was learned from the study (both theoretically and practically – this should be derived from the results and discussion sections), and (c) discuss and critique the theory’s utility for exploring the phenomenon examined. No later than one week before your presentation, you must have your research article approved by your professor. You may seek feedback from your professor up to 24 hours prior to class the day of your presentation.

Exams (Mid-term @ 15% & Comprehensive final @ 25%)
Exams will include material covered in class and readings. Questions will consist of several essay questions, and you will have some choice in questions to answer. Questions will test your breadth and depth of understanding and mastery of the material covered and will assess your achievement of course goals and degree learning objectives.

Mid-term. An at-home essay exam will be administered near the middle of the semester. Even though this is an at-home exam, the Student Code of Conduct remains in effect. This is an open-book, open note exam, but you may receive no additional assistance in completing this mid-term exam. To prepare: (1) know and be able to explain what communication is, what theory is, and the different theoretical paradigms (including the appropriate criteria for evaluating theories in each theoretical paradigm), and apply these metatheoretical ideas to the different theories; (2) know each of the theories covered (be able to apply, define, explain, evaluate, and justify each theory’s use and metatheoretical assumptions); and (3) be able to discuss why we study communication.

Final exam. A comprehensive in-house final exam will be administered during finals week. This is a closed-book, closed-note, no internet exam. You are encouraged to use your laptop/tablet to write your responses; if you do not have one please let your professor know two weeks before the exam so she can reserve one for you. To prepare: (1) know and be able to explain what communication is, what theory is, and the different theoretical paradigms (and the appropriate criteria for evaluating theories in each theoretical paradigm), and apply these metatheoretical ideas to the different theories; (2) know each of the theories covered (be able to apply, define, explain, evaluate, and justify each theory’s use and metatheoretical assumptions); (3) be able to discuss why we study communication; and, (4) be able to discuss the connections and distinctions among the theories and other theoretical concepts.

Responses on each exam must be: (1) yours and yours alone, (2) your original work for this course and for the particular exam this semester, (3) well-written essay responses to the questions posed including an introduction (with thesis and preview), body, and conclusion with assigned readings incorporated appropriately. “A” grade responses require effective and accurate incorporation of empirical research into the responses in addition to the chapters and theory summaries. Not submitting an exam will result in a zero for the exam. No late
submissions are accepted. Because the exams are timed, grammar, spelling, and conciseness will not be considered as a part of the grade, well, as long as I can make sense of what you are saying.

Each exam will be dispersed via Canvas at the start of the scheduled exam time. An electronic document (.doc or .docx only) containing your responses must be up-loaded to the appropriate assignment folder on Canvas by the end of the exam session.

**Research project (50%)**

Your final project will offer an explanation of a phenomenon that you are interested in followed by an in-depth exploration of three theories (covered in this course) that are useful tools for examining the phenomenon. You will work on this project in stages throughout the semester. The final paper must be submitted via the appropriate Canvas assignment (with TurnItIn check; I do this primarily to protect you from having other students use your work in the future, but also as a tool to help you improve your paraphrasing abilities). Drafts will be submitted via Canvas assignments, too. You are encouraged to meet with your professor while developing this paper.

**Grades**

**Grading scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grades also possible on course assignments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>A/A- 3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>A-/B+ 3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>B+/B 3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>B/B- 2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>B-/C+ 2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>C+/C 2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>C/C- 1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>C-/D+ 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>D+/D 1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>D/D- 0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>D-/F 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>See Incomplete Grade policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grading philosophy**

My grading philosophy is that students earn grades through their demonstration of skill and knowledge of course material according to the course requirements and goals. As such, it is your responsibility to demonstrate your knowledge and skills via the opportunities provided. I simply indicate where work falls in comparison to the University’s, Department’s, and course’s standards and expectations. **All work** for this course is assessed according to the following criteria:

1. accuracy of information presented;
2. effective balance of depth of information with the breadth (i.e., focus and scope);
3. conciseness and clarity of writing (this is where you’ll earn brownie points with me); and
4. as appropriate for the assignment, use of APA 6th edition formatting, editing, and citation guidelines (e.g., 1 inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman font, parenthetical citations).

If you have questions about these, please come talk to me.

Simply completing work that meets the basic assignment requirements constitutes a “C” grade (the lowest passing grade for a COM major in this course). A “B” grade is earned through surpassing basic expectations. An “A” grade is earned by performing exceptionally and far exceeding expectations (i.e., high quality writing; thoughtful, informed arguments; accurate integration of evidence across assigned readings and external, relevant materials; etc.).
Grades are a personal matter (and are protected by federal law – FERPA). **Do not discuss your grades with others or request your classmates to share their grades with you. Do not feel obligated to share your grade with someone who asks.** I will not discuss grades outside of a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting.

**Grade availability**
Grades will be recorded on Canvas. All in-class assignments and quizzes will be returned to you with a grade. If there is difference between what is posted and your records, please speak to me privately to rectify the discrepancy. I do my best to return grades within 1 week of the assignment’s due date, but major assignments may take up to 2 weeks to return. All grades are returned at the same time; no one receives grades earlier than anyone else in the class.

**Contesting grades**
If you have questions about your assignments or specific grades, please talk to me. I cannot help you achieve your goals or improve performance if you do not ask.
- If you have questions about your grade, please know that I will not discuss grades or respond to emails about a grade within the first 24 hours after I return a graded assignment. Take time to read and digest the feedback provided.
- If you have questions after a day’s reflection, stop by office hours or email me to schedule an appointment. Discussion must occur in person and in private.

If you believe you deserved a different grade than what was assigned, email me 1 to 7 days after receiving your grade and feedback. In your email include:
- Why you disagree with the grade assigned and your argument for why you believe you earned a different grade. This will help us both be prepared to address those particular issues in detail.
- A request for a one-on-one meeting. Our meeting must take place within 1 week of your initial email to me to the grade. We cannot accurately discuss specific details of the assignment weeks after it was completed. Also, you cannot apply the lessons learned to the next assignment if you wait.

**Sample Daily Schedule**

**Week 1 (Aug 27): Course Overview (Introductions & Defining Communication)**
**Required:**
NCA (no date). What is communication? Retrieved from: [https://www.natcom.org/about-nca/what-communication](https://www.natcom.org/about-nca/what-communication)

**Related readings:**

**Week 2 (Sept 3): Understanding theory (I): Exploring theoretical worldviews (Meta-theoretical assumptions & Meta-theoretical paradigms)**
**Required:**
Related readings:

**Week 3 (Sept 10): Understanding theory (II): Defining & distinguishing the concept of “theory”**

**Required:**


**Related readings:**


**Week 4 (Sept 17): Cognitive theories of communication**

**Required:**

*Action assembly theory*


*Attribution theory*


**Week 5 (Sept 24): Identity theories**

**Required:**

*Face negotiation theory*

Miller, K. (2005). Theories of face and culture (pp. 299-303).


*Communication theory of identity*


**Week 6 (Oct 1): Interaction adaptation theories**  
*Draft 1 (Phenomenon explanation) due*

**Required:**  
*Interaction adaptation & Expectancy violations theories*  

*Muted group theory*  

**Week 7 (Oct 8): Mid-term exam @ 4:00pm – 6:45pm**

**Week 8 (Oct 15): Relational theories (I)**  
*Required:*  
*Relational dialectics*  

*Narrative theories*  

*Related readings:*  

**Week 9 (Oct 22): Relational theories (II)**  
*Required:*  
*Affectionate exchange theory*  
Floyd, K., Hesse, C., & Generous, M.A. (2015). Chapter 23 (pp. 309-320). In Braithwaite & Schrodt
(Eds.).
doi:10.1080/10410236.2018.1439269

**Attachment theory**

**Related readings:**

**Week 10 (Oct 29): Information regulation theories**

**Required:**
*Communication privacy management theory*

*Interpersonal deception theory*
Burgoon, J. K., & Buller, D. B. (2015). Chapter 26 (pp. 249-362). In Braithwaite & Schrodt (Eds.).

**Week 11 (Nov 5): Uncertainty theories**

Draft 2 (Revised Phenomenon explanation + 1 theory) due @ 4:00pm

**Required:**
*Uncertainty management theory*

*Theory of motivated information management*

**Related readings:**

**Week 12 (Nov 12): Work day (NCA week)**
Work day for final paper

**Week 13 (Nov 19): Organizational communication theories (NCFR week)**
TBA

**Week 14 (Nov 26): Influence & compliance gaining theories**

**Required:**
Theory of planned behavior

Goals plans action theory
Dillard, J. P. (2015). Chapter 5 (pp. 63 – 74). In Braithwaite & Schrodt (Eds.).

Related readings:

**Week 15 (Dec 3): Peer writing workshop**
Workshop final papers
Tie up loose ends
Last minute questions about Final Paper, Final Exam questions, etc.

**Week 16 (Dec 10): In-class final exam @ 6:00pm – 8:00pm**

**Week 16 (Sunday, Dec 15): Final paper due by 4:00pm**
academic life

accomplishment

new concept

confusion

comprehension

confusion

epiphany

frustration

hopelessness

drawingboardcomic.com