Communication Theory – COM 290

Western Connecticut State University

**Section 02:** M & W 9:25-10:40am in BR 207 **Professor:** Dr. Jessica Eckstein

**Website:** www.jessicaeckstein.com/teaching **Office Hours:** M & W 12:00-12:30pm

**Email:** jessicommclass@gmail.com Fri (Thurs) 10:00am-2:00pm

***Catalog Course Description***

Consideration of ways theories conceptualize human and mass communication via historical development of academic field of communication and assumptions embedded in theory. Special attention paid to questions and answers communication researchers generate, with a focus on the practical applications of theory to everyday life. Three SHs in this class over 15 weeks = approx. 40 hrs. in class *and* for each hour inside class, about 2 hrs. outside of class (roughly, 80 additional hrs. in the session) working on assignments/studying. That’s a total of approximately 120 actual hours of work to “do” this class.

***Learning Objectives***

This class will (a) introduce students to the discipline of Communication – from an historical perspective and a discipline-specific perspective, (b) examine a selected group of theoretical frameworks included in the general discipline and media area, (c) encourage students to apply the theoretical aspects of communication to personal interaction processes and career choices, (d) teach students beginning research skills, including basic differences between primary and secondary research, and (e) teach students how to write effectively for the discipline using the APA style manual. Through readings and reflection writing, this course will teach you to critically examine theory & prepare you for additional study in the comm field.

***Student Learning Goals/Outcomes***

*1. Describe Communication & Media Arts (C&MA) discipline and its central questions*: (a) Explain origins of, (b) Summarize broad nature of, (c) Categorize various career pathways for students of, (d) Examine contemporary debates within the field of, and (e) Identify with specialization(s) in the C&MA discipline; (f) Articulate importance of C&MA expertise in career development & civic engagement; and (g) Distinguish C&MA discipline from related areas of study.

*2. Employ C&MA theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts*: (a) Explain, (b) Synthesize, (c) Apply, and (d) Critique C&MA theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts.

*3. Engage in C&MA inquiry and creative activity:* (a) Interpret, (b) Evaluate, (c) Apply, and (d) Formulate questions appropriate for Communication scholars & Media Arts scholarship and creative activity; (e) Engage in C&MA scholarship & creative activity using traditions of discipline, (f) Differentiate between various approaches to study of C&MA; and (g) Contribute to scholarly & creative conversations appropriate to purpose of inquiry.

*4. Create messages appropriate to audience, purpose, & context:* (a) Locate & use info relevant to goals, audiences, purposes & contexts; (b) Select creative & appropriate modalities & technologies to accomplish communicative goals, (c) Adapt messages to diverse needs of individuals, groups & contexts; (d) Present messages in multiple C&MA modalities/contexts; (e) Adjust messages while in process; and (f) Critically reflect on one’s own messages.

*5. Critically analyze messages:* (a) Identify meanings embedded in messages*,* (b) Articulate characteristics of mediated & non-mediated messages; (c) Recognize influence of messages; (d) Engage in active listening or participate as an active audience member; and (e) Enact mindful responding to messages.

***What do I expect from you?***

ATTENTION. Listen & comprehend. I won’t repeat myself – either in class or in office hours. Feel free to ask

for clarity, but not redundancy. I won’t tolerate anyone detracting from classmates’ abilities to learn.

PREPARATION. Come to class ready to discuss the day’s content.

PARTICIPATION. My classrooms are active learning environments; “organized chaos” will exist. Class

succeeds to the extent you participate and engage – and both are expected.

ENGAGEMENT. There is no silencing in this class; all are expected to speak and express ideas freely and

respectfully. Everyone’s ideas are important to consider, regardless of bias. I will play “devil’s advocate” to provoke discussion.

RESPECT. I expect you to respect the safety and overall well-being of individuals in the classroom. All are

expected to help create an atmosphere of caring, concern, fun, and energy!

***What can you expect from me?***

\* For each class, I will be fully prepared & work hard to engage you in a stimulating and interactive manner.

\* I will work to provide assignments, discussions, and in-class activities to challenge your thinking.

\* I will be available to you through email and office hours.

\* I will provide clear and concise instructions on all assignments & promptly return them to you graded.

**By remaining in this class after the first day, you are providing passive consent that…**

* You acknowledge reading and understanding all syllabus details/policies; they are non-negotiable.
* You accept that material in this course will be *disturbing*, *controversial*, *offensive*, and/or may otherwise *make you very uncomfortable*; that is the nature of this course.
* If you cannot agree (for whatever reason) to these conditions, you will drop this course.

***MATERIALS:*** To the extent feasible (& legal), I want to save you $. Thus, all assigned materials are accessible from my website. Films may be available online, but are formally only shown in class. Lectures are a primary source of new content in my courses, so I don’t provide full copies online; you must come to class to get that material. To maximize content covered (because I go fast!), I minimize the amount you have to record; available slides are fill-in-the-blank & should be brought to class for corresponding lectures. Documenting info for all resources I use is listed as a pdf file on our website, but I have intentionally *not* APA-formatted it, because that’s one of your course tasks.

***DEADLINES-DUE DATES:*** All assignments must be submitted ON or BEFORE due dates. Late work is not accepted. **Do everything early**; technological difficulties are NOT an excuse. All assignments must be typed and *received* *prior* to the class due. *For assignments, I only accept .doc, .docx, .odt, or .pdf files via email.*

***PARTICIPATION:*** This course is designed with various projects to mirror the real world, where showing up and looking interested are mandatory. Missing class on days of in-class activities means you can’t make it up. Missing class on days take-home work is assigned means you are responsible for getting the info from a classmate; it’s still due when scheduled. My office hours exist to help students understand concepts - not to re-cover material we covered on a day you were absent or not paying attention. Texting, sleeping, reading, doing other-class homework are not acceptable in this class. Doing any of these things (and trust me, I always see you), will result in an *automatic absence* for that day. When using a laptop to take notes, you’ll need to email me your full lecture notes you took on it immediately after class. The student Code of Conduct outlines expected classroom behavior and can be accessed here: <http://www.wcsu.edu/stuaffairs/PDFDOCS/Student_Code_of_Conduct.pdf>. A*ny sort* of disruption will not be tolerated. If considered to be threatening or otherwise disruptive in the course – at the discretion of the professor – student/s will be asked to leave. Failure to leave when asked will result in WCSU security being called and may result in automatically failing the course. \*There *may* be extra credit opportunities throughout the semester – both in and outside of class. I’ll present these to you. *Don’t ask for extra credit; no one gets it if anyone ask*s.\*

***ATTENDANCE:*** Absences do not excuse students from assignments due. I realize there’re times when you simply cannot be in class so 3 absences ***(excused or unexcused)*** are allowed without penalty. I don’t need *or want* documentation, notes, or phone calls…just use freebies judiciously, if at all. Be wise – this is where grades are impacted most. Attendance is taken every class period and you will be graded on participation. **If you miss class, you’re responsible for material covered. Don’t ask me to re-cover the class; get material from a classmate.** This a *very* condensed class that begins on time; walking in consistently late not only affects your knowledge, but other students’ as well. If you are *significantly late* (i.e., I have already started lecturing), you will be noted as such. I understand we all have days when we are just running late, so your tardiness will only affect you if it becomes habitual; when you have accumulated more than 2-3 significantly late days on the attendance roster, you will receive a deduction on your participation points. Habitual tardiness equates to an absence, as does leaving class early. Each absence above your “freebies” results in a deduction of **15 pts.** from your overall score. You’re responsible for withdrawing by deadline; to issue a W, you must personally find/fill out a withdrawal form & get my signature before November (for Fall) *or* April (for Spring).

***PLAGIARISM:*** It’s your responsibility to not only abstain from cheating (i.e., academic dishonesty of any kind), but also to avoid making it possible for others to cheat. Submission of someone else’s work (in literal word or in thought) as one’s own constitutes plagiarism; *info from ANY other sources must be cited in your work, or it’s plagiarizing!* 1st incident: “0” assignment. 2nd offense: fail course, class dismissal, official report.

***WRITING:*** *All writing assignments should be typed (Times New Roman, 12 size font) and carefully proofread for errors.* Both quality of writing style and substance of ideas will be graded; meaning and importance of ideas are inseparable from the language through which they are conveyed. A paper with significant typos, grammar errors, poor organization, lack of clarity, or NOT typed will be turned back to the student without a grade. *In other words, if I have a difficult time reading your college-level paper, I can’t grade it for a college course.* Take the time to make all assignments acceptable at a **college level.**

We use APA writing style on all assignments; APA citation must be provided whenever you refer to the words, ideas, statistics or other information provided by another author. The Writing Lab (in Haas Library) is a place where students can improve all aspects of writing: development, style, organization, grammar, and mechanics. <http://www.wcsu.edu/writinglab/>

***ACCESSIBILITY:*** It is a student’s responsibility to notify me as soon as possible of any needs to aid course participation. Students with disabilities should contact Accessability services (203-837-8225) to discuss reasonable accommodations.

**REQUIREMENTS…TO EARN CREDIT:**

**Please keep track of your grades on the grid (last page) provided. That way, you’ll always know what you’re getting in the course and never need to ask. ☺ *I will not keep a running total of your grades for yo*u – so do it yourself. This also means that if you’re not doing well in the course, you’re responsible for w/drawing yourself. End-of-semester grades are never a surprise, because I return each and every point to you immediately, throughout the semester.**

***1. Participation, Activities, & Assignments: (430 pts)***

This course is interactive in nature. I specifically target material – both in and out of class – to make sure you’re learning to apply the concepts. As such, you’re required to *actively* demonstrate effective communication skills and to come to class prepared to discuss/participate in activities. Specific activities during class will also be derived from this overall score. Many activities are assigned or completed in class, some outside of class. In-class activities are not available for make-up. Think of these activities as another way to get points for being in class and participating fully. Two ways of accomplishing theory-learning are to make you read and to *practice* what we’re doing. ☺

In addition to formal activities, I make a qualitative assessment of your participation/involvement at the end of the semester when I grade. “Negative” things (e.g., tardiness, sleeping, texting/phone use, poor attitudes, hostility/rudeness toward me or classmates, inappropriate behaviors) will bring down this Participation score.

As you can see, the majority of points that comprise your grade in this class require you to actually *show up* and *participate positively* in class.

***2. Theory & Reading Applications: (9 @ 30 pts each = 270 pts)***

Assigned readings will not only introduce material, but will be exemplar studies that apply the theory we’ve just covered. You’re expected to complete theory applications with *insightful* comments in 9 out of 10 possible. This means you can skip one without it hurting your grade.

You will be graded on how well you incorporate the ideas/concepts/key terms from the theory and how well you *analyze* the situation based on the theory’s components. These analyses should be *completely thorough in applying a theory.* The structure of these journals should be roughly this:

* + - In no more than 2 sentences, describe/summarize the theory (in your own words! – like to a 6th grader), and then …
    - Demonstrate how it provides insight into a *specific* communication event. You MUST use the theory’s key terms and assumptions when you talk about your example. Describe the example in the theory’s terms (but in your own words) so that it is a true *application.* You should integrate the assigned application reading to your own context – along with the theory’s info/sources, but your chosen context does not have to be the same as the one in the reading.

You’ll be graded on how well you understood, how appropriately you applied, and the level of insight you provided to the theory and on your use of APA in these assignments. It’s pretty much impossible to complete the application without multiple sources used (from our readings and lecture) so correct in-text & reference page citations are required.

***3. Mini-Reviews: (6 @ 50 pts each = 300 pts)***

Six (50 point) mini-reviews provide an opportunity to topically, incrementally focus. These reviews encourage *applied* mastery of concepts and aid in examining your understanding of skills from lectures and readings.

***Grades are earned, not given!***

Simply meeting the requirements of an assignment *may* garner you a C. Time spent does not equal time earned. Excellence is rewarded, effort is not (though it is appreciated ☺). ***Remember, COM majors need at least a C for this class to count.***

**A = Superior work.** Greatly exceeds requirements. Outstanding creativity, skill, initiative, &/or effort. *Elicits “excellent, really excellent.”*

**B = Good work/above average.** Exceeds requirements. Substantial creativity, skills, initiative, and/or effort. Goes beyond

minimal assignment req’s. *Elicits “nicely done” & gets me telling others you’re doing really nice work!*

**C = Average work.** Meets requirements in every aspect, but does not exceed. I already expect this level of completion from every student on the assignment. *Elicits “OK, they did the work”.*

**D = Deficient.** Meets some requirements, but deficient in others. *Elicits “hmmm, I wonder if they waited till the last minute to do this?”* A good thing to do when you get this grade is to come see me; I really DO want you to pass.

**F = Poor.** Deficient in most or all requirements*. Elicits “well, they blew this off.”* A MUST is to see me!!

***Tentative Schedule***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **DOING IN CLASS** | | **DUE BEFORE CLASS** |
| W - Jan 18 | “Intro to Comm: Definit’s & Discip.” |  |  |
| M - Jan 23 | “Intro to Thry & Resrch, Applicat’s” | Thrizing Activity | Syllabus Quiz |
| W - Jan 25 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #1 |  |
| **STUDY OF MESSAGES, MEANING, & IDENTITY** | | | |
| M - Jan 30 | “Symbolic Interactionism” (#1) |  |  |
| W - Feb 1 | SI Application Day  APA #1 Assigned | SI Activity | ***Pearson & Van Horn (2004)***  SI Application |
| M - Feb 6 | “Cognitive Dissonance” & Applicat.(#2) | CDT Activity |  |
| W - Feb 8 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #2 | ***Bastian et al. (2012)***  CDT Application |
| **STUDY OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION** | | | |
| M - Feb 13 | “Dialectics” (#3) |  | APA #1 |
| W - Feb 15 | Dialectics Application  APA #2 Assigned | Dialect. Activity | ***Braithwaite & Baxter (2006)***  Dialectics Thry App |
| M - Feb 20 | President’s Day – NC |  |  |
| W - Feb 22 | “Social Exchange” (#4) |  |  |
| M - Feb 27 | Social Exchange Application | SocExch Activity | ***Baumeister & Vohs (2004)***  SocExchng Thry App |
| W - Mar 1 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #3 |  |
| **STUDY OF DIVERSITY & POWER** | | | |
| M - Mar 6 | “Muted Groups” (#5) |  | APA #2 |
| W - Mar 8 | MGT Application | MGT Activity | ***Sanderson et al. (2016)***  MGT Thry App |
| Mar 13-17 | Spring Break – NC |  |  |
| M - Mar 20 | “Standpoint Theory” & Applicat. (#6) | Stndpt. Activity |  |
| W - Mar 22 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #4 | ***Kinefuchi & Orbe (2008)***  Stndpt Thry App |
| **STUDY OF MEDIA & MEDIATED COMMUNICATION** | | | |
| M - Mar 27 | “Uses & Gratifications” (#7) |  |  |
| W - Mar 29 | UGT Application | UGT Activity | ***Brubaker (2010)***  UGT Thry App |
| M - Apr 3 | “Hyperpersonal Model” (#8) |  |  |
| W - Apr 5 | Hyperpersonal Application | Hyperpr.Activity | ***VanLear et al. (2005)***  Hyperpers. Thry App |
| M - Apr 10 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #5 |  |
| **STUDY OF PERSUASION: GROUPS & RHETORIC** | | | |
| W - Apr 12 | “Groupthink” (#9) |  |  |
| M - Apr 17 | Groupthink Application  Final Paper Assigned | Grpthnk Activity | ***Kramer & Dougherty (2013)***  Grpthink Thry App |
| W - Apr 19 | “Narrative Theory” & Applicat.(#10) | Narrtiv. Activity |  |
| M - Apr 24 | Quiz Day! | Mini-Review #6 | ***Stutts & Barker (1999)***  Narrative Thry App |
| **PRODUCING THE GOODS!** | | | |
| W - Apr 26 | “Determining Good/Bad Research” | Rsrch. Activity | LitReview “Topics” Due |
| M - May 1 | APA Day! Yay! | APA #3 | Prelim Reference List |
| W - May 3 | Lit Review Revisions & Editing |  |  |
| **Final Lit Review Paper DUE (via email) BEFORE Monday, May 8th** | | | |

**RECORD OF MY GRADES: Total My**

**Possible Scores**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Participation & Activities** | ***430*** |  |
| Syllabus Quiz | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #1 | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #2 | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #3 | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #4 | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #5 | 5 |  |
| Pop Reading Quiz #6 | 5 |  |
| In-class Theorizing Activity | 5 |  |
| SI Activity | 10 |  |
| CDT Activity | 10 |  |
| Dialectics Activity | 10 |  |
| Social Exchange Activity | 10 |  |
| Muted Groups Activity | 10 |  |
| Standpoint Activity | 10 |  |
| UGT Activity | 10 |  |
| Hyperpersonal Activity | 10 |  |
| Groupthink Activity | 10 |  |
| Narrative Activity | 10 |  |
| Research Activity | 15 |  |
| Preliminary Reference List | 25 |  |
| Lit Review | 100 |  |
| APA #1 | 25 |  |
| APA #2 | 30 |  |
| APA #3 | 40 |  |
| Participation Quality | 55 |  |
| **Mini-Reviews** | ***300*** |  |
| #1 | 50 |  |
| #2 | 50 |  |
| #3 | 50 |  |
| #4 | 50 |  |
| #5 | 50 |  |
| #6 | 50 |  |
| **Theory Applications**  **(count 9 out of 10. If do all 10, I’ll drop the lowest score/s)** | ***270*** |  |
| #1 – | 30 |  |
| #2 – | 30 |  |
| #3 – | 30 |  |
| #4 – | 30 |  |
| #5 – | 30 |  |
| #6 – | 30 |  |
| #7 – | 30 |  |
| #8 – | 30 |  |
| #9 – | 30 |  |
| #10 – | 30 |  |

SCALE

90-100% = A= 900 and above

80-89% = B = 800 - 899

70-79% = C = 700 - 799

60-69% = D = 600 - 699

59% or below = F = 599 & below

**MY** **TOTAL POINTS = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/1000**