

Contemporary Theories of Communication

CMST 4114-01, 1:30-2:30, MWF, 202 Coates

Fall 2017

Dr. Jean “Renee” Edwards

Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30; also by appointment or when my door is open

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Overview

This course provides an in-depth study of theory (types and purposes) and multiple specific theories of communication. The class has no formal prerequisites but my assumption is that students have taken previous coursework (9-12 hours) in communication. Please let me know if you have not.

Catalog description: Current methods and theories of human communication; research literature; behavioral antecedents and consequences of messages and their variations; how messages interact with communicators to produce behavioral outcomes.

Objectives

1. To understand the role of theory and the two main types of theories in communication (assessed by exams and class participation)
2. To identify criteria for evaluating theories and apply them to specific theories (assessed using exams and class participation)
3. To understand the major traditions in the study of communication (assessed using exams)
4. To become expert in one or two theories of communication (assessed in theory presentation and paper)
5. To understand the major concepts and principles of additional theories (assessed using exams and class participation)
6. To compare and contrast theories of communication (assessed using exams and class participation)

Text (required)

Griffen, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2015). *A first look at communication theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Evaluation

Exams ($n = 3$)	40%
Attendance and participation	20%
Theory presentation	10%
Paper	20%
Other assignments	10%

Exams – 40% of the final grade

There will be three exams (including the final) over material from the textbook as well as any additional topics discussed in class. The format will be multiple choice, T/F, short answer, and essay. You will need a small ScanTron if a computer classroom is not available.

Attendance and Participation – 20% of the final grade

My goal is for this to be a discussion-based class. You will be expected to read and study the assigned chapters before each class in the same way you would read a story before attending an English class. We will spend class time discussing the major concepts in the chapters (i.e., the theories) and then apply them to situations and compare/contrast them to other theories. Please pay particular attention to the “questions to sharpen your focus” at the end of each chapter.

Students are expected to attend and participate actively in class. Attendance will be taken every day, either by calling roll or passing a roll sheet. I know that emergencies happen – your car won’t start, a friend needs your help, or you feel bad but not sick enough to need medical attention. *For reasons such as these*, you will be permitted 3 unexcused absences. Additional unexcused absences will result in a loss of 10 points per absence. These points will be deducted from this grade category at the end of the semester, which means they will not be factored into your “current course grade” in Moodle. Please keep a mental note of this when checking your grades.

Each class day or week, as appropriate, I will record a percentage grade that reflects your level of participation in class discussions. An absence will be recorded as a “0” unless it is excused (see PS 22, <https://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/policiesprocedures/files/2014/09/PS22-R04.pdf>). The three lowest grades will be dropped, which will account for three unexcused absences (or bad days). Students who attend class but do not pay attention will earn “D” grades. Ds will also be assigned to students whose contributions do not show evidence they have done the assigned reading. Students who come to class, pay attention, and show evidence of reading the assignment but say very little will earn grades in the “C” range. “B” grades will be assigned to those who make contributions (including asking questions) that reflect their comprehension or curiosity about the assigned reading and who are able to make connections that go beyond the reading. These students also remain engaged when other students are speaking. Finally, students who participate fully, demonstrate understanding of the theory, make connections, compare and contrast theories, and engage with other students will earn “A” grades.

A final note on participation: I want every student to participate at the highest level every day. For that to happen, each student must have the opportunity to make valuable and insightful contributions. When another student is speaking, you must practice and show evidence of good listening by looking at your classmate and giving nonverbal feedback. Try to analyze what your classmate says. Is it valid? Does the example fit? Is the comparison to another theory appropriate? In a successful discussion, comments will build on each other. Class participation is not a competition to see who can talk the most – students who attempt to dominate the conversation will not earn “A” grades.

Theory Presentation – 10% of final grade

Either individually or with a partner of your choice, you will be responsible for “teaching” one of the theories to the class. You should create a 5 to 10-minute presentation in which you explain the theory and relate it to an example. You will also generate a list of questions and lead a class discussion for an additional 10-20 minutes.

Paper – 20% of final grade

Option 1. Read and summarize research articles published in scholarly journals and/or chapters published in scholarly books (not textbooks) that explain or are based on a theory of your choice. This may be the same theory as for your presentation but could be different. You should read at least 3 papers (7-10 pp. not including title page or references).

Option 2. Using one of the theories, conduct an in-depth analysis of a text. Your analysis should include a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the theory in understanding the particular text. This may be the same theory as for your presentation but could be different (7-10 pp. not including title page or references).

Option 3. Write a research paper, based on a project, that would be suitable for submission to the Theodore Clevenger, Jr., Undergraduate Honors Conference hosted by the Southern States Communication Association (10-15 pp. not including title page or references). It must be grounded in a particular communication theory but not necessarily the same one as for your presentation. This option, if done well, will earn bonus points by offsetting lower grades in other categories. Let me know early in the semester if you are interested in this option because you will need to submit additional paperwork if collecting data from human participants. **This option requires my formal approval.**

For all options: Your paper should be written in a formal style with a cover page, internal citations, and a reference list. The most recent version of APA manual is the preferred style although MLA will be accepted. Purdue’s “Owl” Online Writing Lab provides formatting guidance and examples at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>. Except for Option 3, you do not need to include an abstract.

You should use Times New Roman font (12 point), 1-inch margins, and double-spaced text. The paper should be in your own words (i.e., avoid plagiarism) and you should use quotations very sparingly.

You will submit your paper via a “turnitin” assignment on Moodle, which will conduct an *Originality Check* to “ensure original work by checking submitted papers against other web pages, student papers and leading library databases and publications” (<https://grok.lsu.edu/article.aspx?articleid=17203>). You may also be asked to submit a hard copy or upload directly to Moodle.

Other Assignments – 10% of final grade

Throughout the semester, you will be given other assignments including (but not limited to) a 1-

page summary of your selected theory, an online assignment, peer evaluations, status reports on your paper, and an oral presentation of your paper.

Grading Scale

A+	97-100	A = Excellence; Distinguished mastery of course material, exhibited by exceptionally well-prepared completion of assignments, demonstrating superior effort, and understanding of principles
A	93-96.99	
A-	90-92.99	
B+	87-89.99	B = Noteworthiness; good mastery of course material, exhibited by above average preparation of assignments, demonstrating original application of course materials
B	83-86.99	
B-	80-82.99	
C+	77-79.99	C = Acceptability; Sufficient mastery of course material, exhibited by satisfactory completion of assignments, demonstrating basic preparation and correct techniques
C	73-76.99	
C-	70-72.99	
D+	67-69.99	D = Deficiency; Inadequate grasp of course materials, exhibited by incomplete preparation of assignments, significant tardiness, poor comprehension of material
D	63-66.99	
D-	60-62.99	
F	0-59.99	F = Unacceptability; Failure to complete the assigned work during the scheduled time or to meet the academic standards of university-level work
Adapted from Mr. Kent Filbel, Department of Communication Studies, LSU		

Moodle

Grades will be recorded in Moodle - you should check it regularly to make sure it is accurate. You must notify me of any problem within three days of grades being recorded. Missing grades will count as “zero.”

Workload

Students are expected, in addition to time spent in class, to spend a minimum of an additional 6 hours per week reading and thinking about material and putting forth effort toward the completion of course assignments. Thus, students are expected to devote at least 9 hours per week toward the successful completion of CMST 4114; exemplary performance will likely require additional time and/or effort.

Notice

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of the accommodations as soon as possible (at least a week before the first exam).

LSU Commitment to Community

Louisiana State University is an interactive community in which students, faculty, and staff together strive to pursue truth, advance learning, and uphold the highest standards of performance in an academic and social environment. It is a community that fosters individual development and the creation of bonds that transcend the time spent within its gates. To demonstrate my pride in LSU, as a member of its community, I will:

- Accept responsibility for my actions;
- Hold myself and others to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity;
- Practice justice, equality, and compassion in human relations;
- Respect the dignity of all persons and accept individual differences;
- Respect the environment and the rights and property of others and the University;
- Contribute positively to the life of the campus and surrounding community; and
- Use my LSU experience to be an active citizen in an international and interdependent world.

The continued success of LSU depends on the faithful commitment by each community member to these, our basic principles.

CMST 4114 Schedule and Assignments

All topics and dates after Sept. 4 are tentative depending on theories chosen by students. Updates will be provided on Moodle.

		Topic	For this day, read or submit
M	Aug 21	Intro to class, text, each other	Syllabus
W	Aug 23	Intro to Theory, Communication	Chapter 1
F	Aug 25	Types of Communication Theories	Chapter 2
M	Aug 28	Evaluating Theories	Chapter 3 ID theory preferences and partner (optional)
W	Aug 30	Continued! Assign theories.	
F	Sept 1	Traditions in Communication Theory	Chapter 4 1-page summary of your theory
M	Sept 4	Labor Day, no class	
W	Sept 6	“orphan theory”	TBA
F	Sept 8	“orphan theory”	TBA
M	Sept 11	Flex day	
W	Sept 13	Review for Exam 1	
F	Sept 15	Exam 1	Chapters 1-4 plus orphan theories
Theories of Interpersonal Communication			
M	Sept 18	Symbolic Interactionism	Chapter 5
W	Sept 20	Expectancy Violations Theory	Chapter 7
F	Sept 22	Social Penetration Theory	Chapter 8
M	Sept 25	Uncertainty Reduction Theory	Chapter 9
W	Sept 27	Social Information Processing	Chapter 10
F	Sept 29	Relational Dialectics	Chapter 11
M	Oct 2	Communication Privacy Management	Chapter 12

		Theory	
W	Oct 4	Social Judgment Theory	Chapter 14
F	Oct 6	Elaboration Likelihood Model	Chapter 15
M	Oct 9	Cognitive Dissonance	Chapter 16
W	Oct 11	Flex Day (SCIPP meeting)	
F	Oct 13	Review for Exam 2	
M	Oct 16	Exam 2	
W	Oct 18	Paper updates	
F	Oct 20	Fall Holiday	
Group and Public Communication			
M	Oct 23	Functional Perspective on Group Decision-Making	Chapter 17
W	Oct 25	Symbolic Convergence Theory	Chapter 18
F	Oct 27	The Rhetoric	Chapter 22
M	Oct 30	Narrative Paradigm	Chapter 24
Mass Communication			
W	Nov 1	Uses and Gratifications	Chapter 28
F	Nov 3	Cultivation Theory	Chapter 29
Cultural Context			
M	Nov 6	Communication Accommodation Theory	Chapter 31
W	Nov 8	Face Negotiation Theory	Chapter 32
F	Nov 10	Speech Codes Theory	Chapter 33
M	Nov 13	Standpoint Theory	Chapter 35
W	Nov 15	Flex day	Work on paper
F	Nov 17	No class, NCA convention	Work on paper
M	Nov 20	Muted Group Theory	Chapter 36 PAPERS DUE
W	Nov 22	Thanksgiving break	
F	Nov 24	Thanksgiving break	
M	Nov 27	Grad Student Lecture(s)	Paper presentations
W	Nov 29	Papers	Paper presentations
F	Dec 1	Review	Review
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 3:00-5:00, FINAL EXAM. This is the last time slot of the final exam period. This exam will be available through the testing center during part of final exam week.			

Graduate Students

1. Graduate students will take the same exams (30% of grade) as undergraduates.
2. For **10 theories**, graduate students will list **three** recent articles that use or present the theory and write a 1-2 page, single spaced summary of **one** of the articles (15% of final grade).
3. Graduate students are expected to participate fully in class discussions about the theories and serve as role models for the undergraduate students. They should feel free to insert new information they garnered from their extra reading of articles. However, they must also be careful not to “drown out” undergraduates whose understanding is at a more basic level (15% of final grade).
4. Graduate students will write formal research papers. The papers should be 12-15

- pages long, should thoroughly review the literature on a given topic rooted in a particular theory of communication. The paper should propose hypotheses or research questions (30% of grade). A data collection is desirable but not required
5. Graduate students will deliver a 20-minute lecture to the class on their paper and theory (10% of final grade).
 6. Daily attendance is expected as a matter of course. Because your distribution of grades is different from undergraduates, your current course grade in Moodle will not be accurate.

HAVE YOU DECLARED YOUR MAJOR OR MINOR?

Business leaders and other professionals recognize the importance of developing communication skills and analysis. Alan Greenspan, for example, stated, “To succeed, you will soon learn, as I did, the importance of a solid foundation in the basics of education – literacy, both verbal and numerical, and communication skills.” We hope this course contributes to your success.

To learn more about communication, you may want to major or minor in the Department of Communication Studies. The program explores how people sustain and change, experience, and make sense of the world through symbolic action. Students develop conceptual skills to analyze written, oral, and visual messages. Students gain practical experience in such areas such as public speaking, group decision-making, performance, and film. Such skills are elemental to careers in business, government, law, social services, and the arts.

A major in Communication Studies requires 36 hours including 12 hours of core classes and 12 hours at the 3000 or 4000 level. A minor requires 15 hours with one core class and 6 hours at the 3000 level or above.

The Department of Communication Studies offers 6 Pathways of Study as guidance for students interested in taking CMST courses. These pathways include lists of courses that can be taken for students interested in the following areas within Communication Studies:

- *Public Discourse*
- *Art and Culture*
- *Professional Communication*
- *Communication in Human Relationships*
- *Visual and Mediated Communication*
- *Create your Own Pathway*

More information is available at www.lsu.edu/cmst or by contacting our undergraduate advisor Mr. Kent Filbel (kfilli@lsu.edu), whose hours are posted at his office, 135 Coates Hall.