



COMM 3309.001 – Family Communication
FALL 2015
Course Syllabus

Professor: Dr. Joseph Velasco
Office Hours: *Wednesday: 9am-11am; 2pm-5pm, or by appointment*
Office Location: FAB 206B
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Email Address: jvelasco@sulross.edu
Class Schedule: 12:30-1:45 p.m., Monday & Wednesday
Classroom Location: LH 201
Required Text: Galvin, K.M., Bylund, C. L., & Brommel, B. J. (2012). *Family communication: Cohesion and change* (8th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Always bring applicable reading material to class with you.

Introduction

“We are born into a family, we are socialized and acculturated within a family, we mature from a family using information and behaviors learned from a family, and, when we die, we diminish a family. Families surround us, shape us, contribute to our destiny.” (Judy Goldberg, family therapist)

Communication is learned and much of what we learn is learned within family contexts. We communicate to meet and interact with other people and to improve all types of relationships. Across the varying dynamics of family, friends, romances, lifestyles, cultures, and interpersonal relationships, communication defines and shapes the interaction as we seek to strengthen bonds. This course is grounded in communication research centered on family interaction and multiple communicative/relational issues implicating family as the core communicative context.

This course is designed as an introduction to communication phenomena in the setting of the family. The overall goal is to 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 communication.



Section I. Course Objectives

The general objectives for this course are to *further enhance your competence and knowledge of human communication within family contexts*. As a student, your learning objectives are to:

1. Develop a communication perspective on the family.
2. Identify and explain various theories in family communication.
3. Comprehend various concepts and discuss them in an intellectual manner.
4. Discuss complex concepts of human relationships in light of your own personal experience(s).
5. Analyze your communication and the communication of others.
6. Demonstrate proficiency with synthesizing concepts from multiple readings in conversation with other students.
7. Develop proficiency with writing which demonstrates the exploration and development of an academic *voice*.
8. Contribute to a collection of academic journal article reviews, thereby constructing a community of scholars amongst your course colleagues.

Section II. Program Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to meet one or more of the program learning outcomes applied to all Communication majors:

The graduating student will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Competently deliver public presentations, including the use of presentation technology such as presentation software, video, and audio.
2. Analyze communication content for argument, including identification of major elements, such as claims, warrants, data, etc.
3. Complete appropriate discipline specific writing assignments.
4. Apply communication theory to the analysis of communication situations appropriate to each degree specialization.
5. Demonstrate competent use of media technology including video, audio, and internet-based technology.

Section III. Course Requirements, Assignments, and Grading

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points Possible</u>
Readings, Contributions	200
LSEs	400
Article Summaries (3)	300
Final LSE	100
Total	1000

Grade Description (Points)

A = 900-1000
B = 800-899
C = 700-799
D = 600-699
F = < 600

Readings and Contributions. In this course **reading is critical**. It may be helpful to think of our class as a reading group. In addition to reading for key terms, you may find it helpful to read for the following information:

- Key ideas and concepts
- Points that you dis/agree with based on other readings (from this course and other courses), scholarly evidence, current events and personal experience
- How the writer's conception of, and/or assumptions about communication may be applied to the analysis of a text or artifact; or how they may relate to a current research project you are working on

Learning Self-Evaluations (LSEs). In order to receive credit, this must be emailed to me by **Friday at midnight** every week. Your responses should thoughtfully and accurately represent your participation and thoughts. You should demonstrate the ways in which your participation contributed to the class discussion and activities and what you learned from the class session. Be sure to answer each question. Otherwise, you will lose points. Finally, as a general rule, a good length for each question is 5 sentences (but I don't like counting sentences, so just do each justice).

Article Summaries. You are required to search the online database (provided by the library) and find **three scholarly journal articles** that both interest you AND relate to the field(s) of relational and/or interpersonal communication. You will then write a one-page summary of each article and **submit one on the designated days in your course calendar**. Please bring a one-page copy for each of your class colleagues. Half of the class will present articles to the class. Basically, you will have to teach the class about the content of the article, informing us of any key concepts, the methods employed, the findings, and discuss the implications of the study. In addition, you will need to prepare two discussion questions to pose to the class concerning your topic. All of this should be included in your handout.

Final LSE. The final exam will be in the form of a final LSE (see above). In this final LSE, you will consider your contributions and the content of the course throughout the entire term. Whereas you are held to a 5-sentence minimum per LSE prompt on your weekly LSEs, the final LSE will require you to write a MINIMUM of 15 sentences per prompt. This is your chance to really demonstrate what you have learned and how far your writing has developed. Push yourself! ☺

Section IV. Policies

Attendance. I expect you to be in class. You are responsible for everything that goes on, including announcements, lecture material, assignments and modifications to the course schedule – *this includes required reading in subsequent class meetings*. Arrange with someone in the class wherein you will notify each other of relevant items in the event that one of you must be absent. Having more than two unexcused absences may result in a lower grade.

Classroom Demeanor. I expect the environment during class meetings to be conducive to learning. I have little tolerance for students talking among themselves when they should be listening to someone else speak. It is particularly disturbing when students talk among themselves when one of their classmates is presenting a speech, giving a report, making a comment, or observing or asking a question. I understand that some comments pertain to class material; I encourage you to share these comments with the class as a whole. Also, I would rather that cell phones, pagers, etc. **not** disrupt class – make sure your communications technology is **shut down** when class begins.

Academic Integrity. I expect and assume that as students you conduct yourselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Sul Ross State University reserves the right, through due process, to place on probation, suspend or expel any student who violates academic integrity and regulations by *plagiarism, classroom misdemeanor, or academic dishonesty*. Plagiarism includes doing and/or taking credit for someone else’s work, presenting the ideas and work of others as your own, and not citing your sources if you utilize the ideas of others. Classroom misdemeanor includes cheating, allowing others to cheat, and interfering with others’ ability to succeed in the course. Academic dishonesty includes procuring examination materials illegally, doing unauthorized group work, and handing in your own work for which you have already received academic credit (see Student Handbook, p. 39-40).

Late Work. *You are responsible for handing in assignments when they are due.* While I am willing to “hear you out” when unforeseen and/or difficult circumstances impede with your course work, I do not generally accept late work, *and especially* if you have not notified me that you’re having problems before the due date arrives. If you miss a due date, you will be given full credit *only* if the assignment was missed because of a University-excused absence – which includes hospitalization or a *serious* medical condition, a family or personal *emergency*, or a University-sponsored activity. In order to be able to make up the assignment, you must notify me beforehand *and* have supporting documentation from a relevant authority that the situation or event occurred. *NOTE: There is nothing in this syllabus that requires me to accept late work; if you submit work late, then receiving credit depends on my allowing you to turn it in. If I do accept late work, it will likely be at half-credit.*

Section V. Notes on University Programs and Policies

ADA. It is Sul Ross University policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request such accommodations because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, please contact the ADA coordinator for Program Accessibility located in FH 112 or call 837-8691.

Calendar

(This calendar is subject to change)

Asterisk denotes a reading outside of the textbook, handed out in class the week before

Week	Date	Topic	Chapter	Assignment/Activity
One	Aug 24 Aug 26	Intro. To Course Providing a Definition	N/A 1	Introductions; Sign-up
Two	Aug 31 Sep 2	Cont'd Patterns and Functions	1 2	
Three	Sep 7 Sep 9	<i>LABOR DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS</i> Framework for Family Comm	2	
Four	Sep 14 Sep 16	Systems Theory & Symbolic Int. <i>Library Workshop</i>	3	
Five	Sep 21 Sep 23	Narrative Theory/Performance Family Patterns and Cultures	3 4	
Six	Sept 28 Sept 30	Relational Maintenance	5	Article Summary 1
Seven	Oct 5 Oct 7	Intimacy	6	Article Summary 1
Eight	Oct 12 Oct 14	Family Roles & Types	7	Article Summary 2
Nine	Oct 19 Oct 21	Power & Influence	8	Article Summary 2
Ten	Oct 26 Oct 28	Family Conflict	9	Article Summary 3
Eleven	Nov 2 Nov 4	Developmental Stress	10	Article Summary 3
Twelve	Nov 9 Nov 11	Unpredictable Stress Coping and Resilience	11 11	
Thirteen	Nov 16 Nov 18	Well-being NCA - TBA	12	
Fourteen	Nov 23 Nov 25	<i>Special Guests: FCCBB</i> Thanksgiving Holiday - No Class		
Fifteen	Nov 30 Dec 2	Semester Wrap-up Last Day of Class		Presentations Presentations

The Final is scheduled for Dec 7th at 12:30pm-2:30pm

Sample LSE

NAME

DATE

LSE #

1. Today's class connects to my course project because my inquiry deals directly with the concepts of *affect transmission* and *movement*. Erin Manning's book works through the concept of *movement* (as inspired by Brian Massumi) by demonstrating how physical movements of all sorts are linked to our corporeal and incorporeal experiences of affect. To affect and be affected are certainly at the crux of her argument of what a body can do, however, her book goes further to hint at how *movement* and *affect* create bodies of relation – and more importantly to my work – bodies *in* relation. I am not certain, but I think a deeper analysis of these concepts could help me examine how soldiers returning to their families also bring home with them all the traumas that were experienced in wartime.
2. My most important contribution built off of Dawn Marie's line of questioning that interrogated the mapping of *intervals* situated within a context of race or the politics of race. I recall her asking where or how could such mapping begin. "What would it look like?" To me, mapping the intervals within systems of power brought to mind the talks I've had with friends and students about privilege. For me, it is easier to explain privilege through a metaphor. I choose to describe privilege by describing a person's movement through an unknown building while wearing a blindfold. Everything about the building is unknown less its perception beyond the person's sight. In fact, the person does not even know it is a building. Any and all perceptions of this space are due to the person's movements and the barriers that are bumped into. Some people bump into more walls than others. Some get slammed constantly and fall down stairs with no railings. Other people are not even sure that a building exists around them because they mostly experience smooth surfaces under their feet and rarely a wall in their face.

To me, mapping the intervals of affect and movement within the context of racial politics could be envisioned similarly. People relate to each other according to each other's rhythms, whether they are in sync or not. People move about in anticipation or with little expectation to feel affective and bodily barriers. Their intervals, pulses, and other movements may be characteristic of power and privilege acting on them (or moving with them, alongside, under their feet, in their face). Perhaps this can explain how bodies may react when power differences and privilege differentials are co-present. Bodies react, they quiver with uncertainty. The asynchronous rhythms create intervals that are unpredictable, uncomfortable, and foreign. It's difficult to relate to someone with a different rhythm. We've all heard someone say or themselves described their relationship with another person as being "out-of-sync" or "not meshing well" or "we don't gel". Maybe this is part of why people feel that way.

3. Now that I think about it, I wish I had said something when Kathryn was talking about transformation as being a state of being that, to her, seems very final like a terminus that someone accomplishes and movement (and development or progress) can be assumed as

over. When she was talking about this, I thought of creating a new term: *transformation*. Perhaps this can account for people's constant movement and constant becoming, but may speak more to those moments when more movement occurs than usual and the body enters a different rhythm. The body moves into a different state of resonance similar to giving off a different musical tone or pitch due to differences in vibration or other movements.

4. The topic I was most interested in was thinking about how my sub-discipline might be different if Manning were taken seriously in interpersonal and family communication. Just having Manning's work taken seriously, I believe, is not enough to create a major paradigm shift. At this point, something really revolutionary would have to happen for us to completely shift our focus away from messages and meanings, but I do think some interesting things would happen to current theory. For example, systems theory might be tweaked to include a different understanding of what a system is.

Briefly, systems theory emphasized the interconnected and interdependent nature of family relationships. Traditionally, a family is assumed to be a system by their family-ness. According to family communication scholars (see Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999), the definition of family is not rooted in a bio-genetic model, rather in communication. Applying Manning's emphasis on movement to attend to relationships, the definition of family might be adjusted to include the language of movement, perhaps emphasizing shared rhythms and deeply felt and shared intervals of affect (be it positive or negative). With such a change to the definition of family, the definition of 'system' could morph into something that acknowledges varying degrees of system-ness (based on affect and movement within the system). Thus, influenced by Manning's work, scholars could move toward interrogating, for example, rhythms that constitute varying levels of family-ness and system-ness.

5. I still want to know more about Darrin's discussion of attention. Darrin talked about how people are only able to jointly construct something together if they are not focused on themselves or another person. The focus has to shift to something between people. This had me thinking about how people attend to relationships. Is the relationship a separate entity that can receive attention other than the 'I' or the 'you'?
6. Now that I know how well LSEs help me to reflect on my own learning and experience of the classroom, I will certainly make use of them in my future course designs. I admit that when I first started writing them last quarter in Kate's course on the everyday, I felt like I was catching a bit of a case of the freshmen seminars. About halfway into that quarter I began to realize how much LSEs were helping me grasp the material and reflect on my own contributions. Keep it up.

LEARNING SELF EVALUATION FORM
(due every Friday by midnight)

1. **Today's class connects to my previous knowledge (either from this course or previous courses), beliefs, and/or experience in that...**

2. **My most important contribution to today's class was...**
(Supply enough detail to jog my memory. Be specific. Be sure to locate your contribution within the larger conversation with me and classmates online or face-to-face.)

3. **Now that I think about it, I wish that I had said...**

4. **The topic I was most interested in or touched by was...**

5. **I still wonder or want to know...**

6. **Now that I know ---, I have new ways to think, articulate, and/or act in regards to...**