



**COMM 4305.001 – Relational Communication (*Service-Learning Option*)**  
**SPRING 2017**  
**Course Syllabus**

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**Instructor:** Joseph Velasco, Ph.D.  
**Office Hours:** Tuesday through Thursday: 2pm-4pm, or by appointment  
**Office Location:** FAB 206B  
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**Email Address:** [jvelasco@sulross.edu](mailto:jvelasco@sulross.edu)  
**Class Schedule:** 12:30 p.m. - 1:45 p.m. Monday & Wednesday  
**Classroom Location:** MAB 301  
**Required Text:** Guerrero, L. K., Andersen, P. A., Afifi, W. A. (2011). *Close encounters: Communication in relationships* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston: Sage.

*Always bring applicable reading material to class with you.*

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### **Introduction**

*How do people maintain their romantic relationships?*

*How are some relationships different from others?*

*Why do we form friendships and why am I more close to some friends and not others? In what ways do people develop closeness with friends, siblings, parents, etc.?*

*How can I communicate more effectively when in conflict with others?*

A field within the diverse discipline of communication, relational communication is a well-established intellectual area, complete with a base of knowledge, theories, and research developed by communication scholars. In recent years, interest in relational communication has mushroomed, making it one of the largest and most vibrant areas in the discipline. Reflecting the intellectual maturity of the field, communication theory and research offer rich insight into the impact of relational communication on individual identity and personal, social, and professional relationships.

This course offers an in-depth examination of human relationships which goes beyond understandings of human communication typically found in introductory interpersonal courses. This course, then, extends our knowledge of interpersonal communication while also refocusing our examination with what we will call a *relational perspective*.



## Section I. Student 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 II. Course Learning Objectives

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

1. Identify and explain various theories and concepts in the fields of relational and interpersonal communication.
2. Analyze your communication and the communication of others.
3. Synthesize concepts from multiple readings in conversation with other students.
4. Develop proficiency with academic and reflective writing.
5. Contribute to a collection of academic journal article reviews, thereby constructing a community of scholars amongst you and your course colleagues.
6. Effectively present, through an oral presentation, your summary of a relevant academic journal article.
7. Understand the concept of service-learning.

## 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
<b><i>Service Learning Option</i></b>	<b><i>200*</i></b>
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! 😊

***Service-learning Options.*** According to the National Service-learning Clearinghouse (2015), service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

Service-learning is a process of involving students in community service activities combined with facilitated means for applying the experience to their academic and personal development. It is a form of experiential education aimed at enhancing and enriching student learning in course material. When compared to other forms of experiential learning like internships and cooperative education, it is similar in that it is student-centered, hands-on and directly applicable to the curriculum.

The critical difference and distinguishing characteristic of service-learning is its reciprocal and balanced emphasis on both students learning and addressing real needs in the community. Course learning objectives are linked to meaningful human, safety, educational, and environmental needs that are co-determined with community partners and service recipients. Course materials such as lectures, readings, discussions, and reflection activities supplement the student service. In turn, the service experience is brought back to the classroom to enhance the academic dialogue and student comprehension. Students work on real problems that make academic learning relevant while simultaneously enhancing their social skills, analytical ability, civic and ethical responsibility, self-efficacy, and career development.

In this class, you ARE NOT REQUIRED to participate in service-learning. This is an invitation. If you choose one of the options below, **you may opt out of two article summaries** and up to **two class days**. If you decide to take this course for honors credit, you may accomplish this without opting out of any class days or article summaries. You would still need to talk to me about an honors contract, however. Below are your options for service-learning:

**Option #1**

Solicit supplies from the community to help you construct hospitality/care-packages for clients of the Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend (FCCBB). This will require you to communicate with the FCCBB professionals as the needs of their clients may change over time.

**Option #2**

Develop creative educational materials and programs for the FCCBB. For example, you may explore your creative skills in developing coloring books and/or story books for children dealing with family violence, addiction, poverty, and other challenges.

**Option #3**

Develop some form of community education related to families. This *could* include advertising an educational event at the public library, developing a website/blog for parents, presenting to a classroom of (non-SRSU) students. As always, I am open to your creative suggestions.

**Option #4**

Coach a little league sports team. This opportunity would put you right in the middle of interacting with children and parents.

## 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. 66).

**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)

Week	Date	Topic	Chapter	Assignment/Activity
One	Jan 16	Dr. MLK, Jr. Day – no class		
	Jan 18	Intro. To Course	N/A	Introductions
Two	Jan 23	Relational Communication	1	
	Jan 25	The Social Self/Identity	2	
Three	Jan 30	Attraction	3	
	Feb 1	Managing Uncertainty	4	
Four	Feb 6	Relational Changes	5	
	Feb 8	Privacy & Disclosure	6	
Five	Feb 13	Communicating Closeness	7	
	Feb 15			Article Summary 1
Six	Feb 20	Love	8	
	Feb 22	(More) Love	8	
Seven	Feb 27	Sex	9	
	Mar 1	(More) Sex	9	
Eight	Mar 6	Relational Maintenance	10	
	Mar 8			Article Summary 2
Nine	Mar 13	SPRING BREAK – no class		
	Mar 15	SPRING BREAK – no class		
Ten	Mar 20	Coping with Conflict	11	
	Mar 22	(More) Conflict	11	
Eleven	Mar 27	Influence	12	
	Mar 29	Dominance	12	
Twelve	Apr 3	Relational Transgressions	13	
	Apr 5	Hurtful Messages	13	
Thirteen	Apr 10	Healing	14	
	Apr 12	Forgiveness	14	
Fourteen	Apr 17			Article Summary 3
	Apr 19	Outcomes of <i>Ending It</i>	15	
Fifteen	Apr 24			<i>Family Crisis Symposium</i>
	Apr 26			<i>Family Crisis Symposium</i>
Fifteen	May 1	Ending Relationships	15	
	May 3	<b>LAST CLASS</b>		TBA

The Final Exam is scheduled for May 9<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m.-2:30 p.m.

## SAMPLE LSE

9/13/2013

LSE #2

**RATED ACCEPTABLE**

1. This week's classes connect to my previous belief because of family origin. People have always said that a person will turn out like their family. If a person is hit as a kid, they will hit their kid. If the parents are weak-willed, they will be weak-willed parents. It seems to be a common theme in parenting, and it's hard to break the cycle.
2. My most important contribution to this week's classes came on Thursday. I said that divorce can be a good thing. I also seemed to be the only one to have that opinion. Zach really seemed offended by my assumption as well. After hearing his story, I could see why. But by me saying that, it got a lot of people to open up.
3. Now that I look back on the classes, I wish I had talked about my experiences about the different family patterns that I've seen. In middle school, there was a kid in my class that would always come to class with bruises. We'd always end up seeing them in gym class. Well, we eventually figured out that his father was abusive. Fast forward to a few years ago and he has a kid of his own. Fast forward to now, and you can tell that he doesn't even raise his voice to the kid. He broke the pattern. I don't know how, but I'm really glad he did.
4. The topic I was most touched by was the conversation about familial patterns. I mean, I clearly was influenced by it. All of my questions so far have been about it. It just resonated with me. I started thinking about all of friends and their families (old and new) and all of these gears started clicking into place. I kind of thought that already, but to have it basically affirmed made me think about it a lot more.
5. I still want to know more about crossing the graphs shown in class to show their correlation. You said we'd eventually get to it, but that doesn't mean I don't want to know now.
6. I definitely have a new way to think about divorce/marriage. I never thought about the negative repercussions about divorce so fully until the stories from class came out. My parents divorced peacefully; why would I know about a terrible divorce, you know? As for marriage, I originally just felt that it was just something people did to show love. Now I can see why people would put so much stock into a piece of paper. It's a symbol of their family.

## SAMPLE LSE

**RATED UNACCEPTABLE**

### LSE 1

1. This week's class, I think it was great start to the semester. I really look forward to the class discussions.
2. I feel like I did not contribute because I have not read the chapters. I did feel lost but now that have more time, I will catch up. I had to move to a new place and I have been really busy.
3. Now that I think about it, I wish that I had read the chapters.
4. The topic I was most interested in is...this entire class. Is it possible that I can get a copy of the reading that the graduates got? I'm just curious.
5. I still want to learn more about family communications. I know that this class will help me in my family life.
6. Now that I know a little more about.

Note: This is the first LSE and I know what to do to make them stronger and better. I need read the readings and take better notes.



SAMPLE LSE

COMM 3309

November 15, 2013

**RATED EXCELLENT**

LSE #11

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

I spent half of Cat's presentation scribbling furious notes to myself about Debi Pearl – a maven of patriarchy teaching for women, whose husband Michael's best-selling child rearing manual, *To Train Up a Child*, has been linked to the deaths of at least three children when parents crossed the line from spanking to abuse after reading it. The spanking debate is a subject for another LSE (and makes me wish like anything I could have been in class for Tuesday's discussion of parenting and aggression!). In the Pearls' world, spanking is not just a tool for enforcing structural traditionalism, but a means of expiating a child's sin so he can move on from guilt, accept his parents' forgiveness, and feel happy again. Essentially, the parent must "break the child's will" through discipline so he may become a fit candidate for heaven. (If you think this sounds like the rigorous emotional self-mortification of the Puritans, only to the power of about a thousand, you are right. Michael Pearl, however, is not a Puritan. A petition is circulating in the U.K. to ask amazon.uk to stop selling his book.) His methods are the extreme of behaviorism. The child learns not to have an individual will, but to conform to whatever is the parent's whim at that moment. Pearl justifies this by writing that if his children are in danger, he needs to know that they will respond instantly to his command to move or stand still, for their own protection.

Similarly, Debi Pearl teaches wives they are not to have a will of their own. In her book *Created to Be His Help Meet: Discover How God Can Make Your Marriage Glorious*, she writes that a woman should submit to whatever is her husband's whim at the moment, including submit to painful intercourse. This is an actual quote: "Do you think your body has special needs?" God's purpose in creating woman was for her to complete a man (so far, so good); therefore, a woman has an unbelievable amount of power to make or break her man's self-esteem and success in life (red flag); therefore, if "her man" (quoting a Loretta Lynn song) is struggling, it is the wife's fault (big problem here). If he has anger issues, it is because his wife is not supportive enough. If he is abusive, it is because she does not make him feel "reverenced." If he is unfaithful, it is because his wife is not sexy enough. She should dress and act seductively in order to win him back from that "cheap office hussy." Not even kidding!

The reason I connected Cat's presentation to Debi Pearl is the emphasis Pearl places on indirect strategies, specifically positive affect. She pushes the 1950s housewife archetype: a wife who is not merely submissive, but saccharine-sweet. I've read that 1950s magazines encouraged middle-class wives to act like little girls (childish and giddy, with a "girlish" giggle), because husbands were supposed to find this attractive. (Maybe a man feels less compunction about making adult decisions on behalf of a woman if she's a child who doesn't know her own mind?) Pearl advocates the same thing, telling the wife to be a "playmate" to her husband and win his affection with giggles and spontaneity. Better yet, here's another quote, taken from Pearl's letter of advice to a wife devastated by her husband's affair (courtesy of a multi-part review posted at Love, Joy, Feminism on patheos.com):

"It is in your best interest to learn to use feminine wiles. A woman holds her man with the fragile threads of adoration, thankfulness, delight, and just plain fun. He needs to hear gladness and appreciation in your voice when you speak to him, even when you are talking of everyday things.

"Don't ride him with suspicion. Don't play detective and follow him around. But do call his work with a giggle in your voice, and give him fair warning that you expect 'some loving' when he gets home, then giggle and ask him if he is blushing.

"Be creative and aggressive in your private, intimate times. Keep him drained at home so he won't have any sexual need at work. If you feed him well, emotionally and sexually, her cooking won't tempt him."

Or this – a concise summary of Debi Pearl's notion of positive affect and its critical role in marriage:

"Every day, I remember to view myself as the woman God gave this man. This mind set helps me to be just that: a gift, a playmate, his helper."

## **2. My most important contribution to today's class was...**

Melissa and I had the same thought at the same moment (I love it when that happens!): The age, socioeconomic status, and education level of the couples in Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch's survey were likely to affect spouses' use of influence strategies. Dr. V. picked this up and took it in the direction of household stress levels, which typically correlate with poverty and/or unemployment or with the transition into parenthood. Even with children present in 97% of households, these homes were comfortably middle-class, reducing economic stresses substantially. In over 50% of households, both partners worked full-time outside the home, meaning that if one partner lost his/her job, the family could probably survive financially.

Melissa noted that with a college education, most of the spouses could be financially secure if unmarried, and this might make them more likely to use direct influence

strategies since neither felt dependent on the other. I think we can take this further and note that people with more education tend to be more open to gender equity in terms of shared household chores, parenting responsibilities, and decision-making. (In addition, the mean (average) age was in the late thirties, and if the median age was similar, most participants would have been attending college around 1990, when equity feminism was becoming more popular.) If both spouses entered the marriage with this mindset, it is not surprising at all that both men and women reported using direct and bilateral strategies.

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

There were several points where I wanted to enter the conversation about influence strategies, but there wasn't a long enough pause. It is probably better I didn't say anything, however, because what I was thinking might not have come out right. I wanted to interrogate the role of negative affect as a defensive strategy in the face of stonewalling, based on my own experiences in arguments with my boyfriend, but it is a personal enough topic (and raw enough, after a huge argument on Wednesday) that it's probably best I didn't try to explore it in class discussion before I had fully thought through what I wanted to share and knew I could do it objectively, without negative emotions from the experience clouding my description of it. Out of respect for him, I want to make sure that what I share in public is fair and accurate and not too personal.

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

I was most interested in John Gottman's "four horsemen of the apocalypse," one being stonewalling or withdrawal. After class I found an article by Fowler & Dillow (2011) that links childhood attachment schemata to these four conflict behaviors. Gottman wrote that criticism, defensiveness, contemptuousness, and stonewalling are potential harbingers of the death of a relationship, because they are so destructive. Fowler & Dillow surveyed 170 individuals in established romantic relationships on their attachment orientations (anxiety and avoidance), correlating their answers to measures of the four conflict behaviors. They write, "The findings suggest that individuals whose attachment orientations reflect fears of abandonment and rejection may tend to enact conflict behaviors that increase the chances of their concerns becoming reality." In other words, the patterns we learn in childhood from our primary caregivers affect our ability to relate confidently as adults. Particularly with men, who (based on other research I've seen) are more likely to use stonewalling, this is likely to be true. Researchers have noted that male infants tend to make eye contact with their caregiver less than females and to seek independence earlier in a variety of ways, and this is often pinpointed as a biological difference. At the same time, though, doesn't our culture socialize boys to be less emotionally connected to others? Does this mean caregivers are less attentive to male babies from an early age, creating a negative attachment orientation? This could be an evolutionary response, in that (I have read that) female babies may be born weaker and smaller and need more care in order to survive. (Another possibility that comes to mind is early childhood trauma, which can shortcut verbal communication of emotions. I am not arguing for or against religious circumcision, but I will say this: the way medical circumcision is practiced in the modern United States is certainly traumatic. The infant is

removed from his primary caregiver – his mother – typically within a few hours after birth, strapped into place, fitted with a surgical clamp, and put through a major surgery often without the proper anesthetic [that is, it happens so quickly the anesthetic has no chance to take effect]. Some mothers have noted that after the surgery, their sons won't suckle and – most significant – won't make eye contact. If these researchers in the early twentieth century were observing boys who'd been circumcised with this method, is it any surprise that they showed more aggression with peers and less desire to attach to their caregiver than girls did?)

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

Branden's article summary brought up more questions relative to last week's discussion of violence in media and its influence on children. He indicated that children who hear news reports about mass shootings can react with fear and a traumatized response. If this is true, how much more may children who witness media violence (that is, violence in movies) be traumatized? When we first watched the Walt Disney *Snow White* in about 1994, my then three-year-old sister was so distressed by the scene of the huntsman with the knife that she left the room in tears and wouldn't return until we assured her the "scary part" was over. I don't think she watched that movie (or *Beauty and the Beast*...remember the wolves?) until she was at least ten or eleven. On the other hand, as Dr. V. suggested, is there a difference between fantasy violence and reality? Do inner-city children who grow up with gun violence in their neighborhood develop a fear response, while affluent children whose only exposure to violence is in video games become desensitized? Where is the line between reality and fantasy for an individual child? Why did my sister have an extreme response to fear-inducing media, even though we'd never seen real violence or even heard much about it on the news? How much of the difference lies in personality, and how much in other aspects of the home environment, or even in genetics?

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

The discussion of influence strategies in marriage made me aware of the behaviors and behavior cycles in my relationship with my boyfriend. Without going into too much detail, I'll say I recognized Gottman's cycle of the "four horsemen" right away. The cycle starts when I say something that comes across as criticism, and he responds with defensiveness. I also recognized the influence strategy of negative affect. I wouldn't dream of "sulking" or "acting cold" toward my parents or sister; why in the world do I think it's OK to do in an argument with my boyfriend? This week's class discussion brought my attention to some personal housecleaning I need to take care of.

**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...**