

Communication 625  
Communication Theory  
Fall 2009; 3 credits

Robert B. Arundale  
TTh 3:40 to 5:10 pm  
Gruening 301

#### A DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

Comm 625 is a course for professionals in the discipline of Communication--for persons whose careers will involve research, teaching, and/or use of our knowledge of human communication. One cannot be involved in inquiry into human communication, in teaching about it, or in applying knowledge of it without being informed about the nature of theory, about how theory comes into being in inquiry, and about specific theories of communication. In the broadest sense, understanding these issues is the goal of this course.

Persons who are uninformed about "theory" think of it as a body of knowledge that may be hypothetical or untested, or which has little direct relevance to practical affairs. Nothing could be further from the actual case. Theories are general summaries of what we know or understand about phenomena, on the basis of past experience and inquiry. Communication theories are directly relevant to practical affairs in that one cannot be effective in understanding and dealing with problems in human communication unless one has access to such summaries of our knowledge. As a consequence, one cannot be fully effective as a communication professional without both a background in and an ability to use communication theories.

Goals: By the end of the semester, each person should:

- 1) Understand and be able to explain what constitutes the "communication approach" to human behavior that distinguishes our discipline from others, such as psychology or sociology.
- 2) Understand the historical and philosophical context both of current scientific inquiry into, and of theorizing about human communication.
- 3) Understand what constitutes a theory and why theory is the goal of scientific inquiry.
- 4) Understand a number of key exemplars of theories constructed and employed in the discipline of communication.

As the above goals suggest, we will not (and could not) cover all theories relevant to human communication--there are simply too many. We will look carefully at selected theories in communication, and you will work very closely with two specific theories in your papers. This background should give you the ability to work with any theory of communication, as the need arises throughout your professional career.

#### EXPECTATIONS:

##### a) **Reading:**

There is a considerable amount of reading for this course. Much of this reading is aimed at other professionals in the discipline of Communication, hence the ideas and issues you encounter will not be "pre-digested" and "pre-packaged" as in most textbooks. If what you read doesn't "come together," don't sit back and wait for it to magically sink in--get to work trying to understand it using the resources available to you: other related reading, the library, your classmates, your

instructor. In short, the reading you do will require you to actively THINK, not passively absorb. The reading assigned in this course is required and is to be accomplished PRIOR to the class meeting for which it is assigned. You are expected to be prepared to discuss and to use the reading material in your interaction in class.

**b) Interaction:**

*Comm 625 will challenge you intellectually.* You will be expected to get involved in and to struggle with new concepts and points of view, some of which are highly general or abstract. If you choose to be passive rather than active in approaching this work, or if you try to struggle with these ideas on your own, the course will be difficult for you, and you'll gain relatively little from it. If, on the other hand, you choose to be active, to exchange and interact with others who are working with the same ideas, the course may actually be easier, and you will gain far more from it. A concept not questioned is a concept not learned, and this applies both to reading and to classroom interaction.

Careful, thorough reading and active exchange and interaction in class are the two essentials to a productive experience in Comm 625. I will do my best to facilitate both, but I expect you to do your full part--I cannot do them for you, and the responsibility for both ultimately rests on you. Regarding class interaction, in particular, you'll obviously have to be there on a regular basis to take part. In addition, we will work to maintain an atmosphere that supports the mutual exploration of ideas. To do so, questions must be used to explore and expand ideas--*there is no such thing as a stupid question*. Similarly, all responses must be seen as tentative steps of approximations toward grasping a body of knowledge--*there is no such thing as a wrong answer in a discussion*. Exchange and interaction carried out in such an atmosphere results in change in views and opinions on each person's part, and requires respect for the questions, answers, views, and opinions of each other person.

**c) Time:**

I expect you to spend at least TWO HOURS reading and/or working on this course before every class meeting. And I expect you to keep up with the reading assignments and work by devoting this time to the course on a regular basis. Reading assignments are geared to this time expectation and the entire conduct of the course depends on your keeping up with this reading and work. If you cannot meet this expectation, please drop the course now. Because the outside reading work is intended as input for use in class, you won't be learning what you could or should be if you have not done the preparation, and you will be unable to participate in or gain from interaction in class. Failure to keep up with the rest of us will hurt all of us, and result in a painful experience for you, not to mention a low grade.

**d) Communication Department Expectations and Policies:**

It is especially important that you read carefully the final section of this syllabus on "Communication Department Expectations and Policies." These expectations and policies apply to this and to all courses offered by the Department. Questions about these expectations and policies are welcome.

### e) Cell Phones and Computers:

Modern electronics has its positives and negatives. The negatives of cell phones in class require that they be turned off when you enter the classroom. That means NO TEXTING. Laptops used in the classroom are also a distraction to others, and to users, who become disengaged from the class when operating them. As a consequence, laptops and palm held devices are to be shut down and stored when class begins.

### TEXTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

On a later page you will find an "outline syllabus" giving the key course topics and key readings for the major parts of Comm 625. This outline syllabus is NOT complete, because it does not list all reading assignments in detail. We need to retain the flexibility to move faster or slower, and to adapt to changes. For that reason, reading assignments will always be made in class, on a day-to-day basis. If you want to read ahead, use the outline syllabus as a guide. The tests and major assignments, and their dates, are listed in the outline syllabus. There will be no "surprise" projects or tests, and no extra credit projects.

The text material is:

- 1) *The Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty, M. Sage, 1998.
- 2) *Theories of Human Communication, 9th ed.*, Littlejohn, S.J & Foss, K.A., 2008.
- 3) An extensive set of reprints in addition to the textbooks, to be assigned and treated just like a regular text. These reprints are NOT available as a text. These reprints will be provided to you as needed throughout the semester.

### OFFICE AND OFFICE HOURS:

503G Gruening Building; Phone: 474-6799; Email: rbarundale@alaska.edu (may take 48 hrs!)  
Noon to 1:00 PM: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday. Not available Fridays.

Other times are possible, if we make an appointment in advance, but do not expect to find me in my office at "any old time," or expect that I will be able to meet with you if I am at my office at a time other than those listed above. Best to call ahead.

### NOTES ON GRADING:

These notes are intended as a sketch of the grading for the course for your reference. Some details have been omitted, which we will talk about in class as the appropriate time approaches. If you have questions at any point about these notes, please talk it over with me.

The final grade for the course will have five parts: Two parts will be your grades on the mid term and final exams, at 100 points each. Two parts will be your grades on two annotated bibliographies, the first worth 80 points, and the second worth 120 points. The final part will be your grade on the final paper, worth 350 points. The total possible points is thus 750. Your final grade will be the sum of the points you have earned, divided by 750, with final grades determined according to the University's plus/minus grading scale (90-100% = A; 87.0 to 89.9% = A-; 83.0 to 86.9% = B+; 80.0 to 82.9% = B; 77.0 to 79.9% = B-; and so on; below 57% equaling an F).

## TESTS:

The two tests during the semester will be essay type tests covering the reading and class discussion that has occurred since the last test, although the second test will also include questions of a more general or integrative nature. I will ask class members to generate questions for the tests, and it is to your advantage to write a good question and submit it to me, since the question might well appear on the test. I will have to edit questions for clarity and appropriateness, and will contribute questions where I think important issues have been overlooked.

## PAPERS:

1) Annotated Bibliographies: On FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, as well as on FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, you will submit an annotated bibliography comprised of FIVE two page (double spaced) entries in which you examine and ***discuss the theoretical background*** of a current report of research or application related to communication. More details will be available later, but the goal of these bibliographies is to broaden your understanding of theory as well as of the use of theory in the production of knowledge and the solution of practical problems. More specifically, you will annotate articles or book chapters published since 1990 (exceptions only for "landmark" works approved by me in advance). Each entry will begin with a citation in APA format, and include an ORIGINAL review of the work cited, detailing especially the theory and concepts employed.

Again, more details will be available later, but for the first annotated bibliography you will select two theories from Littlejohn & Foss and then locate current reports of research or application that employ the theory. The theories may not be ones that we have covered or will cover in class. For the second annotated bibliography you will also work with two theories from Littlejohn & Foss (or elsewhere, with approval), at least one of which must be a different theory than that chosen for the first "bib." If relevant to the term paper, one of these theories may be one of those covered in class. Again you will locate current reports of research or application as the focus of your annotations. Note that in some cases the theoretical background is NOT detailed in a given article, is it only cited--you will be responsible for locating more information on the theoretical background if Littlejohn & Foss' treatment is not adequate. You should consider the work required for the term paper when planning your work on the bibliographies.

2) MONDAY, OCTOBER 20: I will ask to submit a one page paper on this date identifying and discussing the theories that will be your focus in the term paper.

3) Term Paper: On FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, you will submit a 20-24 page paper (double spaced) in which you discuss how two different theories in communication are employed in the study of a single question or problem in communication. Again, more information will be provided at a later point, but the goals of this paper are: 1) to examine thoroughly how one's choice of a theory serves to frame the entire process of research or application, and 2) to compare and contrast the two theoretical perspectives you examine, especially with regard to the similarities and differences in the explanations or understandings provided of the phenomenon under study. I suggest strongly that you select a research question or application area *for which there is some history of research* (hence the link to the annotated bibliographies). I will comment on preliminary drafts, but only if they reach me 10 days before the paper is due. *As for all written work submitted in the Department of Communication, adherence to APA style for writing and citations is expected.*

Criteria for evaluating Comm 625 papers:

- 1) Level of understanding of research question(s), structure of the study, and results of the research or application examined (annotated bibliographies only).
- 2) Level of depth of understanding of the scope, purpose, and central features of the theories involved or examined.
- 3) Level of ability to recognize and analyze strengths and weaknesses in the theories (term paper only).
- 4) Level of clarity and care in comparing and contrasting the theories (term paper only).
- 5) Level of clarity in expression and organization, and of care in presentation, i.e., free of technical errors, spelling errors, employing APA guidelines (format, citations, references, etc.).

#### OUTLINE SYLLABUS:

Note again that this is NOT a comprehensive list of readings, but only a broad guide to the structure of the course. Reading assignments made in class will ALWAYS take precedence.

DATE: TOPIC & KEY READINGS TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE CLASS :

- 9/3 Introduction, Comm. as a discipline, Views of science & Communication
- 9/8 Perception: Schneider, et al., Toch & Maclean reprints, Littlejohn & Foss (hereafter L & F)
- 9/10 Conduit & Toolmaker Metaphors, Conjoint Co-constituting: Reddy, Pearce & Foss reprints
- 9/15 Conjoint Co-constituting model of Communication: Arundale reading
- 9/17 Conjoint Co-constituting and Social Construction: Arundale reading
- 9/22 Uncertainty reduction & expectancy violation theories: Berger reprint, L & F
- 9/24 Systems theory: Fisher reprint, Littlejohn reprint
- 9/29 Interactional or Pragmatics theory: Griffin; Watzlawick et al., reprints, L & F
- 10/1 Coordinated management of meaning: Philipsen reprint, L & F
- 10/5 Relational dialectics: Baxter & Montgomery reprint, L & F
- 10/8 Theoretical traditions and the discipline of Communication: L & F, ch. 3
- 10/13 Theory in social/human science: Kaplan reprint
- 10/25 Theory and explanation and understanding: Kaplan reprint

OCTOBER 16 (FRIDAY) FIRST ANNOTATED BIB. DUE

10/20 TERM PAPER SKETCH DUE: Theory & explanation; Criticism as a mode of inquiry:  
Reading TBA

OCTOBER 22 (TUESDAY): MIDTERM TEST

10/27 Elements, epistemology, & ontology: Crotty, ch. 1

10/29 Positivism & problems: Crotty, ch. 2

11/3 Received view of science: Polkinghorne reprint

11/5 Constructionism & Crotty's oversight: Crotty, ch. 3, Arundale reprint

11/10 & 11/12 No class. National Communication Association Conference

NOVEMBER 13 (FRIDAY): SECOND ANNOTATED BIB. DUE

11/17 Social Construction, Conjoint Co-constituting: Pearce reprint

11/19 The social construction view of science: Arundale reading, Polkinghorne

11/24 Interpretivism 1: Crotty, ch. 4

11/26 Interpretivism 2: Crotty, ch. 5, L & F

12/1 Critical inquiry: Selections from Crotty, chs. 6, 7

12/3 Feminism & Postmodernism: Selections from Crotty, chs. 8, 9

12/8 On the ethics of constructing communication and people: Krippendorff reprint

12/10 Metaphors of communication: Krippendorff reprint.

DECEMBER 11 (FRIDAY): TERM PAPER DUE BY 3:30 PM

DECEMBER 17 (THURSDAY): 3:15 PM; FINAL TEST (FINAL EXAM TIME)

## Communication Department Expectations and Policies

The University/student relationship is not one of producer and consumer. When students, parents, scholarships, and/or other funders pay fees in order for a student to attend classes, this obligates the student to a set of educational responsibilities and expectations. Education is a *process* in which critical thinking skills and analysis are concentrated upon throughout one's academic career. Following are the expectations and policies of the UAF Communication Department. These expectations and policies are endorsed by all faculty members and will be implemented in all Communication classes.

1. **Assignment deadlines:** Late assignments will result in the loss of one letter grade per working day that the assignment is late. The **only** exception to this policy is a carefully **documented** emergency or University sanctioned activity (e.g., scholastic conferences, athletics). In cases of life contingencies, arrangements must be made to submit work **before** the deadline date.

2. **Make-up exams:** Make-up exams are only given in Departmentally approved circumstances, as noted above regarding assignment deadlines. Arrangements for any make-up exams must be made **prior** to student's absence.

Note that in all instances, scheduled final exam times will be adhered to; thus it is incumbent upon the student to plan travel times accordingly.

3. **Attendance:** For those classes which require attendance, note that absence means "not present," regardless of "why" you are not present.

4. **Tardiness:** Tardiness equals absence in so far as the attendance record is concerned. Anyone not present when attendance is taken will be listed as absent.

5. **Disruptions:** Don't **ever** enter a classroom while a student presentation is being given. This is rude and unfair to those students who are on time. Such disruption can cause severe speaking apprehension for students who are already less than comfortable in front of a classroom.

6. **Reading:** Getting an education requires **careful, concentrated reading**. It is expected by this Department that students spend at least two hours in reading and/or working on a course **before every class meeting**. This Department views work outside the classroom as a minimal expectation and strongly suggests that you **should not take this class until you are ready to meet this expectation**.

7. **APA:** All assignments **must** be submitted in correct, current American Psychological Association (APA) style. If you are unfamiliar with APA style, manuals are available for study, but not check out, on Reserve Reading in the Library, in the Writing Center, and in the Communication Department Resource Area (Gruening 503). Good writing and proper written form are essential skills of any student of Communication.

8. **Grade Inflation:** The following qualitative guidelines suggest the expectations of this Department regarding grading. This grading policy is adopted from the University's general grading guidelines found in the UAF Catalog (Section on Academic Regulations).

A -- An *honor* grade, indicates originality and independent work, a thorough mastery of the subject and the satisfactory completion of more work than is regularly required.

B -- Indicates outstanding ability above the average level of performance.

C -- Indicates a satisfactory or average level of performance.

D -- The lowest passing grade, indicates work of below-average quality and performance.

F -- Indicates failure. All "F" grades, including those earned in pass/fail courses, are included in the GPA calculations.

9. **Incomplete grades:** The letter grade "I" (Incomplete) is a temporary grade used to indicate that the student has satisfactorily completed (C or better) the **majority** of work in a course but for reasons **beyond the student's control** (such as medical emergencies), has not been able to complete the course during the regular semester. An Incomplete will only be assigned in emergencies and **only when the student is current in the class until at least the last three weeks of the semester**. Negligence or indifference are not acceptable reasons for an "I" grade.

10. **Student Code of Conduct:** All work on assignments and exams, and all participation in classes must conform to the UAF Student Code of Conduct, published in the UAF Catalog. Specifically, the Code **prohibits plagiarism**, which is presenting of the work of others as one's own, whether in writing or in oral presentations. More specifically, plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another person without a complete citation of the source of the words or ideas. Paraphrasing another person's work by rearranging their words or summarizing their ideas **also** constitutes plagiarism, unless one provides a complete citation of the source. For courses in Communication, using more than three words in sequence from another source, without citation, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is a very serious form of academic dishonesty, and will result in a zero grade for the assignment in which it occurs, potentially a failing grade for the course, and the possibility of disciplinary action by the University, as noted in the Student Code of Conduct.

11. **Accommodations:** Any student who has a physical or medically documented learning challenge is invited to contact your instructor early in the semester so that ways to accommodate any difficulties can be anticipated. I will work with the Office of Disability Services (203 Whiting, 474-7043) to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.

## Departmental Policies on Complaints Regarding Instruction

**1. Student complaints.** Any student who might wish to complain about instructional matters regarding a course, a professor, and/or an instructor must follow this formal procedure:

a. All student complaints must be discussed **first and only** with the faculty or TA with whom the student has a complaint or problem, **before** such complaints will be addressed by **any other member** of the faculty, including the Department Chair.

b. If a student wishes to pursue the issue as a formal complaint, that complaint must be submitted **in writing** to the faculty or TA to whom the complaint is directed **within one week** following any such aggrieved incident and/or occurrence (e.g., grade complaint, procedure complaint, teaching incident, etc.).

c. When the instructor receives a student's **written complaint**, s/he will **respond in writing within a reasonable time period** and is required to **schedule a meeting with the student** to discuss the stated complaint. This results in a possible resolution occurring at the level closest to its origination.

d. If, after meeting with the instructor to discuss the written statement, the student does not believe that the complaint has been sufficiently addressed, s/he may then request that the instructor schedule a meeting with the **student, instructor, and TA Mentor/Department Chair** (depending on whether the instructor is a TA or faculty member). The hierarchy dictates that the TA Mentor be consulted at this point if the instructor is a TA, whereas the Department Chair be consulted if the instructor is a faculty member.

e. Prior to this meeting, the instructor furnishes a **copy of the written complaint and instructor response** to the TA Mentor/Department Chair and schedules a meeting for the three parties. If, after this meeting, the student still does not find that the matter has been sufficiently addressed, then the Department Chair schedules a private meeting with the student. A written report of this meeting will be recorded by the Department Chair/Mentor.

f. **Only** after this policy has been followed does the matter proceed beyond the Department.

g. These Departmental policies do not contravene UAF formal policy, e.g., student grievance and appeals policies.