

**Syllabus: Communication 425 F01**  
**Communication Theory – writing intensive**  
**University of Alaska Fairbanks, MWF 10:30-11:30, GRUE 308**  
**Fall 2009**

Instructor: Karen Taylor

Email: kmtaylor4@alaska.edu (this is probably the easiest way to reach me)

Work Phone: 474-6818

Office Hours: M-W 12:30-2:00 (or by appointment)

Office Location: 503C Gruening Bldg.

**Required Texts:** 1) Griffin, Em (2008). *A First Look at Communication Theory, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* McGraw-Hill.  
2) additional readings listed on syllabus, available on Blackboard

---

### **Course Description**

Communication Theory builds on previous courses taken in the discipline and satisfies the university writing-intensive requirement. This course has four primary goals:

1. Students should be able to read and understand scholarly articles in communication: therefore, we will read original research articles and rely on the textbook primarily for interpretation
2. Students should be able to critique and potentially enact methods appropriate to theories: therefore, we will conduct various activities in each major paradigm and critique primary-text articles
3. Students should be aware of the diversity of the field and key thinkers within it: therefore, we will endeavor to understand the history of each theorist and his/her position within the field of communication
4. Students should be able to understand and apply communication theories: therefore, each of seven theorists that we address will also have an activity or an assignment to help students relate theory to their own lived experiences

You will become more critical in your observation of communication practices in all areas of your life, and develop your scholarly skills sufficiently to produce new knowledge about communication practices. These skills will be developed through a series of in-class activities, readings and related quizzes, and a twelve-page research paper.

**IMPORTANT:** As a theory course, it is inevitable that there will be a great deal of reading (~50 pages/week), and some of it will be quite challenging even for skilled readers. As a writing-intensive course, it takes for granted that you have already mastered basics such as sentence construction, paragraphs with proper transitions, development and defense of an argumentative thesis, and citation practices (APA is the preferred citation style in this course). If you have difficulties with either of these skill sets, you should explore resources such as the Writing Center and the library's study-skills offerings.

## Course Assignments

Research Proposal: 5%  
Compare/Contrast Paper: 20%  
Revision: 5%  
Final Exam: 15%  
Daily reading quizzes: 20% (11 quizzes @ 2% each, with lowest 1 dropped)  
Activities and Participation: 15%  
Article Selection Presentation: 20%

## Statement of Policies for this Class

### Student Responsibilities:

**A: ATTENDANCE.** All students are expected to attend every class and the final exam. Attendance is a graded element of this course. You are also responsible for in-class activities (which cannot be made up). There are some circumstances for which absence is unavoidable, such as illness or family emergency, in which case I expect written documentation. A student with an unexcused absence on the day of their presentation will receive a **zero** for that presentation. There will be no accommodation for students who are absent on the day of the scheduled final exam.

**B: PARTICIPATION:** I believe that participation is important for a theory class because it helps us connect the abstract general theory to our own concrete lived experience, and hearing how others do that connecting increases our own cognitive complexity. Participation in discussions and activities is required. Each class period provides the opportunity to earn up to four participation points, with one for contributing through listening, two for contributing relevant comments, and three for good questions. Similarly, points can be earned for participation using Blackboard. Negative participation points can also be earned, for any behavior deemed disruptive (cell phones, talking while others speak, arriving late, etc.).

**C: TIME.** Each student must be prepared to spend time in class and outside of class (approx. 2hrs/class). Assignments turned in late will be penalized at the rate of 1 letter grade reduced per day. Readings are expected to have been completed prior to the day they are listed on the syllabus. Quizzes can begin at any time during the class period, and additional time on the quizzes will not be granted. Quizzes cannot be made up without **written** documentation of justifiable absence.

**D: ETHICAL STANDARDS.** All interaction in the classroom is to be consistent with the Credo for Ethical Communication of the National Communication Association, which has been adopted by the Department of Communication. Any suspected plagiarism will be penalized, as laid out in the university policy. You are expected to be familiar with the university's regulations as laid out in the Student Code of Conduct.

**E: STUDENT SUPPORT:** Students with special needs or concerns need to contact Student Support Services (474-6844) for documentation to present to Instructor. The Office of Disability Services (474-7043) provides accommodations to students with disabilities. The instructor will also attempt to make reasonable accommodations for students with alternate learning styles/needs, whether documented or not, if the student raises these concerns as early as possible.

## TENTATIVE Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Assignment
Sept 4	What is Communication?	Review syllabus
Sept 7 9 11	What is Theory? What's a Good Theory? Where does Theory come from?	Chpts. 1 & 2 quiz Playing Clue in Comm Austin "Three Ways of Spilling Ink" on Blackboard
Sept 14 16 18	Theory and Methodology inseparable But then what is Methodology? Some Myths about Methods	Chpt. 3 quiz Criteria activity Trevor&Pinch "Private Science Public Knowledge" on Blackboard
Sept 21 23 25	A Brief History of... Theory? Starting Points: Theory in Context Drawing Boundaries	Chpt. 4 quiz Descartes debates soc/psych/comm. compare
Sept 28 30 Oct 2	a Socio-Psychological Theory Expectation, Violation, Deliberation	Chpt. 7 (Burgoon) quiz The Lying Game Ramirez&Wang "When Online Meets Offline" on Blackboard
Oct 5 7 9	a Cybernetic Theory	Chpt. 13 (Watzlawick) quiz Garfinkeling Time Hoye&Kaiser "Branding a Symbol" <b>Proposals DUE</b>
Oct 12 14 16	a Rhetorical Theory	Chpt. 23 (Fisher) quiz Narrative Analysis Johnson "From Where We're Sat"
Oct 19 21 23	a Semiotic Theory	Chpt. 5 (Mead) quiz  Domingo "Stop Slammin' Sammy"
Oct 26 28 30 last day drop	a Socio-Cultural (Interpretive) Theory	Chpt. 6 (Barnett/Pearce) quiz  Bruss et.al "Food Culture Family"
Nov 2 4 6	a Critical Theory	Chpt. 34 (Harding) quiz  Droogma "Redefining Hijab"
Nov 9 11—15	the writing process no class, instructor at NCA	writing center visit
Nov 16 18 20	a Phenomenological Theory experiencing true dialogue	Chpt. 12 (Baxter) quiz I-Thou moments Jian "Unpacking Unintended Consequences in Org. Change"
Nov 23 25--27	no class Thanksgiving	<b>Comparison draft DUE</b>
Nov 31		Chpt. 36 quiz

Dec 2  
4

Dec 7  
9  
11

presentations  
presentations

Dec. 14

**Revisions DUE**

FINAL EXAM, Friday Dec. 18 10:15-12:15

### **Descriptions of the Assignments**

The primary assignment for this writing-intensive class is the Comparison/Contrast paper. The first step in writing this paper will be to select a communication phenomenon that you are interested in studying further. The easiest way to approach this is to define a single question, one that is sufficiently interesting to you to sustain in-depth study over the course of the entire semester. Examples might be drawn from personal experience (“my partner and I have such different reactions to cell phones ringing during dinner, what’s up with that?”) or relate to professional concerns (“am I better off joining a work group that is high-performing already, or joining a work group that has problems that I might be able to fix?”). The Research Proposal (due Oct. 10) will introduce the communication phenomenon that you will investigate. It will then outline in **less** than one page what you currently know or believe about the phenomenon, including a description that addresses the “five W” questions. The Proposal should include a bibliography of at least five sources that you think might be at least tangentially useful in studying this phenomenon, with a description of how you think it might be useful. So, for example, in considering the professional question about work group performance, related scholarly sources might include any information about whether or how to change practices of an already-established group, but it might also include any information about what supervisors typically look for in deciding whom to promote, or information about what characteristics of co-workers typically lead to job satisfaction. To consider the example drawn from personal experience, related scholarly materials might include research that has been done about cell phone usage patterns and norm-development, but it might also include information about the role of the evening meal across cultures, or information about gender differences in friendship maintenance. I do not expect you to have actually read any of these sources, nor are you necessarily required to refer to them in the finished paper. The goal is to prove you have begun and know how to proceed with thinking about the communication phenomenon in question as a topic of theoretical work.

The Compare/Contrast paper should be twelve pages at a **minimum**; there is no upper page limit. The first part of the paper will present a developed version of the description of the communication phenomenon. The goal of the paper is to select **two** communication theories and illustrate how each one applies to the phenomenon, and what conclusions each theory would draw regarding that phenomenon. Ideally you should look for two theorists that would suggest different ways to understand and answer the question asked initially. You should understand each theory well enough to speculate about how to extend it to address aspects of the phenomenon that are not explicitly considered anywhere in the scholarly literature. You should organize the paper to first consider and emphasize the differences between what the two theories would suggest, but then the conclusion of the paper should end with looking for areas of similarity that both theories would agree on for how to understand and approach the

phenomenon. So to continue considering the example raised regarding professional development, one might select Poole's structuration theory and McCombs/Shaw's agenda-setting theory; arguing that structuration theory would favor joining the less-developed group while agenda-setting theory would favor joining the high-performing group; and then concluding that both of them would leave room for getting promoted but that structuration theory makes the further point that happiness might be easier to achieve in the high-performing so the final choice should be to join the successful group. Or, to return to our example drawn from personal experience, one might select Social Penetration Theory and Face Negotiation Theory; arguing that SPT might explain that both partners are attempting to show high levels of intimacy but with discrepant signs for doing so in that one shows trust by emphasizing inclusion even in unrelated phone calls while the other shows priority by emphasizing exclusion of outside relations, while Face would suggest that one partner is emphasizing relatedness while the other partner is emphasizing autonomy as a means to increase desirability; the conclusion would note simply that both theorists agree that the best solution is to shift to meta-communication about the discrepancy.

The Revision of the paper is not optional, it is a requirement even if the previous draft received mostly positive feedback. The Revision is not graded on improvement, it is graded by using a higher set of standards roughly comparable to those used in the peer-review process for publishing in scholarly journals. Before turning in the final Revision, you are required to take into account feedback from both the instructor Writing Center. You will probably find it most useful to visit the Writing Center before turning in the paper the first time, but if not you will have to do so before turning in the Revision because I will be looking for their feedback on whether the descriptions of the theories are clear enough to be understood even by a non-expert in the field.

On all stages of the paper, writing will be graded in part on grammar. Formatting should be a 12-pt font, double-spaced, margins not less than one inch, pages numbered. The bibliography should be included with every submission of the paper, and it should be in proper APA style. The guidelines for APA are available online at [www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org). Theories available for selection include any of those covered in Griffin's textbook, and could conceivably include theories drawn from other sources if cleared first with the instructor.

Regarding other assignments, the presentation of a scholarly article will be an oral presentation with a target time of 15 minutes, on your choice of a research article from any of the communication journals. The presentation will address questions about what the author(s) do for a theoretical framework, their methodology and how it relates to the theoretical frame, and an **evaluation** of the authors' contribution. The final exam will include a matching section and several essay questions.