**Course Overview**

**Course Description.** This course represents an advanced treatment of theory in the communication discipline. Theoretical traditions and theories discussed in this course are used by scholars to explain and/or interpret communication processes in various communication settings.

**Student Learning Outcomes.** At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to:

- explain the role of theory in communication inquiry.
- demonstrate an understanding of the communication field according to its theoretical traditions.
- demonstrate an understanding of prominent theories, theorists, and issues and debates related to theory in the field.
- compare and contrast major communication theories.
- evaluate the strengths and limitations of communication theories.
- identify and critique scholarly research that uses theory.
- illustrate how theory is used to understand and test communication processes.

**Course Materials**


Additional readings will be available through blackboard and on reserve in the library.

**Course Policies and Procedures**

**Attendance.** Students are expected to attend every class as attendance is required for participation in this course. Work missed during excused absences (those due to extreme illness, a family emergency, a religious holiday, or an excused university activity) can be made up. Provide documentation of excused absences prior to planned absences and within a week of unplanned absences to make arrangements for missed work. Work missed due to unexcused absences may not be able to be made up. Additionally, students are responsible for obtaining the information covered in class.
Late Work. All assignments are due at the beginning of class time on the assigned day. If I do not have the assignment by the beginning of class that day, the assignment is late. Each calendar day that the assignment is late will generally result in a one-letter-grade reduction. Work missed during excused absences (see above) can be made up. In-class work and quizzes may not be able to be made up.

Media. When class is in session, laptops may be used only to take notes. Students may not use the internet, instant messaging programs, email, or any similar programs during class unless otherwise instructed to do so. Similarly, mobile phones should be turned off. Students who are using laptops or mobile phones inappropriately will no longer be allowed to bring them to class.

Communication. This course will rely on blackboard and islander email accounts to communicate electronically with students outside of class. Students need to be sure to check both regularly.

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work for the appropriate citation of sources, and for the respect of others’ academic endeavors. Academic misconduct will be monitored in this course. Plagiarism, turning in papers which are not one’s own, utilizing a previous paper, and collaborating on papers will not be tolerated and will result in the reduction of one’s grade and/or immediate failure in the course.

Notice to Students with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in Driftwood 101, at 825-5816. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

Grade Appeal Process. As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

Questions and Problems. If you have concerns about the class, please arrange to discuss them with me during my office hours or by appointment.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

I. Theory Presentation & Discussion. Over the course of the semester, each student will present and lead discussion on two different theories. At the beginning of the semester, students will have an opportunity to select which theories they will present. Students may not present more than one theory per class period. This assignment involves several components. See assignment sheet for full description.
II. Exams. Two exams will be given this semester. Exams will cover readings, discussions, and presentations. Exams may be composed of a combination of multiple choice, true/false, or matching questions; short answer questions; and essay questions. The exams are designed to test both students’ understanding of the material and their ability to apply course information.

III. Theory Paper. Students will write a paper comparing any two theoretical approaches to a topic of your choosing. See assignment sheet for full description.

IV. Participation. Critical discussion is an essential component of a graduate seminar. Students are expected to arrive to class having read all of the assigned class material and be prepared to discuss all of the readings for that day. Students may also be asked to turn in informal assignments and responses, which will count towards their participation grade.

Good discussion at the graduate level includes several important components: listening to and respecting others’ opinions, sharing ideas and thoughts, posing questions to classmates, responding to and building off of others’ comments, making connections between disparate thoughts and concepts, and encouraging others to share their ideas. Questions, comments, and answers should not be directed to the instructor. Instead, good critical graduate-level discussion involves actively listening to and engaging other students in the classroom. Monopolizing conversations, disrespecting or criticizing others, and creating a discordant atmosphere are unacceptable participation techniques. As a courtesy to others, please turn off mobile phones and put away computers during discussion.

To prepare for class discussion, consider the following questions when reading the course materials:

• What are the main components of the theory?
• What does the theory tell us about communication processes? How can it be used to understand and study communication processes?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the theory?
• What issues or points did you find particularly compelling or problematic?
• How does this theory connect to other theories?
• What are some directions for future research using or advancing the theory?

Assignment Summary.

<table>
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<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theory Presentation 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory Presentation 2</td>
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**COURSE EVALUATION**

**Evaluation.** Grades are based on demonstration of mastery of course material. Work that meets the minimum requirements of an assignment, is done on time, and displays average involvement with the course content is deserving of a 'C.' Higher grades are awarded to work that goes above and beyond the minimum standards to produce products that reflect superior intellectual effort, excellence in critical analysis, and overall creativity in the approach to any given assignment.

**Grading Scale.** Use the following percentages as a guide for determining your grade.

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<td>80-89%</td>
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<td>70-79%</td>
<td>348-397</td>
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<td>60-69%</td>
<td>298-347</td>
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<tr>
<td>59% &amp; below</td>
<td>below 197</td>
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**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1**

Aug. 24  
Course Overview and Introduction  
Introductions  
Perceptions of Theory

**WEEK 2**

Aug. 31  
Defining Theory  
Overview of Communication Theory  
Connecting Theory and Research  
*Readings:* Miller Chapters 1 & 2  
Infante, Rancer, & Womack (1997)  
Berger (1991)  
Burleson (1992)  
Proctor II (1992)  
(for more on the Chautauqua see Proctor II, 1992 & Berger, 1992)

**WEEK 3**

Sept. 7  
Perspectives on Theory  
Evaluating Theory  
*Readings:* Miller Chapters 3-5  
Miike (2007)

**WEEK 4**

Sept. 14  
Theories of Symbolic Organization  
- Schema Theory  
- Attribution Theory
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theories of Message Production</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 5    | Sept. 21 | • Constructivist Theory  
|      |        | • Action Assembly Theory  
|      |        | • Planning Theory  
|      |        | • Goals-Plans-Action Theory |
|      |        | **Readings:** Miller Chapter 6  
|      |        | Supplemental Readings TBA |

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<th>Date</th>
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| 6    | Sept. 28 | • Cognitive Dissonance Theory  
|      |        | • Social Judgment Theory  
|      |        | • Elaboration Likelihood Theory  
|      |        | • Inoculation Theory  
|      |        | • Problematic Integration Theory |
|      |        | **Readings:** Miller Chapter 7  
|      |        | Supplemental Readings TBA |

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theories of Discourse and Integration</th>
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</table>
| 7    | Oct. 5 | • Speech Act Theory  
|      |        | • Coordinated Management of Meaning  
|      |        | • Communication Accommodation Theory  
|      |        | • Expectancy Violation Theory |
|      |        | **Readings:** Miller Chapter 9  
|      |        | Supplemental Readings TBA |

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theories of Communication in Relationships</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Week | Date | Theories | |
|------|------|----------|
| 9    | Oct. 19 | • Social Penetration Theory  
|      |        | • Uncertainty Reduction Theory  
|      |        | • Relational Systems Theory  
|      |        | • Relational Dialectics Theory |
Readings: Miller Chapter 10 & 11
Supplemental Readings TBA

WEEK 10
Oct. 26  Theories of Organizational Communication
- Social Exchange Theory
- Weick’s Theory of Organizing
- Text and Conversation of Organizing
- Unobtrusive and Concertive Control Theory
Readings: Miller Chapter 12
Supplemental Readings TBA

WEEK 11
Nov. 2   Theories of Small Group Communication
- Structuration Theory
- Functional Theory
- Symbolic Convergence Theory
- Communication Privacy Management Theory*
Readings: Miller Chapter 13
Supplemental Readings TBA

WEEK 12
Nov. 9   TBA

WEEK 14
Nov. 16  Theories of Culture and Communication
- Speech Codes Theory
- Politeness & Face Theories
- Standpoint Theory
- Muted Group Theory
Readings: Miller Chapter 16
Supplemental Readings TBA
Assignment: Theory Paper Due

WEEK 15
Nov. 23  Theories of Media Processing and Effects
- Media Effects Research
- Social Cognitive Theory
- Uses and Gratifications Theory
- Media Systems Dependency Theory
- Agenda Setting Theory
Readings: Miller Chapter 14 & 15 (pp. 269-276)
Supplemental Readings TBA

WEEK 16

Nov. 30 Theories of Media & Society
- Spiral of Silence Theory
- Cultivation Theory

Future of Communication Theory

Paper discussions
Readings: Miller Chapter 15
Supplemental Readings TBA

FINALS WEEK

Dec. Final Exam

*This schedule is tentative. Changes may be made throughout the semester.
**This is not traditional small group theory; it is considered more of a relational theory.

SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS
(Ordered by reading sequence)

Graduate Seminar in Communication Theory
Theory Presentation & Discussion Assignment

The textbook provides concise overviews of core theories in the communication discipline. However, the overviews are limited in scope. This assignment is designed to build and expand on textbook information while giving you an opportunity to become particularly knowledgeable of specific theories. The assignment is also designed to build presentation and discussion-leading skills at the graduate level. Additionally, the assignment gives you power to select course readings that are relevant to your and your classmates’ interests. The assignment has several components:

1. Theory Selection. At the beginning of the semester, you will have an opportunity to select which theories you will present. You may not present more than one theory per class period. Prior to selection, you are encouraged to review the theories described in the textbook to gain a basic understanding of the types of theories covered to determine which theories may be of particular interest. You may choose to learn more about theories that you have discussed in other classes, select ones that may be relevant in future research, or choose those that seem interesting.

2. Research the Theory. You will need to read about their theory from other sources and investigate both how the theory has been advanced as well as how it has been used in research to understand, investigate, or explain communication processes. You will select one article that you want the class to read that you believe illustrates the theory’s use. This article must be sent to the professor two weeks before the presentation so that the article can be approved and posted for classmates to read. As evidence of preparation, you will turn in an annotated bibliography with a minimum of five references, although more references are encouraged. Be sure to plan ahead. Students need to meet with me at least one week prior to the presentation to talk about the theory and presentation.

3. Present the Theory. You will have 30 minutes for your theory presentation and discussion. The presentation should include the following:
   - a brief overview of the theory (what it is, how it has evolved),
   - examples of how the theory has been used in research,
   - critique of the theory, and
   - an interactive discussion about the theory.

There is no one right way to present the theory, however, it should not be a recitation of the information in the textbook. Your job is to expand on the information provided. Feel free to be creative. You can use various types of media, activities, discussion techniques, formats, etc. The goal is to illustrate your understanding of the theory and its use in the communication discipline and to share that understanding with your fellow classmates.

4. Deliverables. The day of the presentation, students will need to turn in their annotated bibliography related to the theory, an outline of the presentation, and a list of discussion questions.

5. Evaluation. You will be evaluated on the following:
   - demonstration of knowledge of the theory, its uses, and critiques,
   - selection of an appropriate article for the class to read and delivered in a timely manner,
   - completeness and appropriateness of the annotated bibliography,
   - development of discussion questions and engagement of classmates in discussion about the theory,
   - demonstration of good presentation skills & techniques.
Graduate Seminar in Communication Theory
Theory Paper Assignment

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to give students the opportunity to connect theory to communication processes and to examine how different theories can tell us different things about the same phenomenon.

Assignment. You will select two different theories and compare and contrast how those two theories would approach a topic of your choosing. Begin by selecting a topic of interest. This may be something you have examined in another course or some area that you would like to know more about. I encourage you to select a topic that really interests you and which you could become passionate about. You will need to make sure your topic is fairly narrow.

Next, review the theories examined in the course. This will require that you look ahead as you will have to select your two theories before we have thoroughly discussed all of them. Think about how each theory connects to your topic. If you were to use a particular theory to study your topic, what would you learn? What could this theory tell us about your topic? The two theories do not have to be similar. They may be from different theoretical traditions or

Once you have selected your theories, you need to focus on determining how those theories apply to your topic and could be used as a framework or basis for studying your topic. What features of your topic would be particularly relevant to each theory? What would each theory tell us about your topic? What information might we gain from using a particular theory? What are the advantages and disadvantages to each theory’s approach to the topic? How do the two theories compare in their utility to understand communication phenomena associated with your topic?

In the paper, you will need to
- explain why you chose your two theories.
- systematically demonstrate how each theory would be applied to research the topic.
- compare and contrast the value of using each theory on your topic.

You will need to come in and talk with me about your paper at least two times during the semester. This will allow me to help you stay on track, flush out ideas, and motivate you to keep working.

Paper length: 15-20 double spaced pages

Due date: Final paper is due November 16. Other due dates (for meetings, topic, theory selection, etc., will be announced in class.

This assignment is derived from Steve Duck’s Communication Theory assignment at the University of Iowa.