CJT 651: Communication Theory

Fall 2015

Mondays: 3:00 - 5:45 p.m.
223 Enoch Grehan Journalism Building
Course Canvas Access: uk.instructure.com/

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Office Hours: Mondays 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. or by appointment

“A theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among the variables, with the purpose of explaining and (or) predicting the phenomena.” (Kerlinger, 1986)

“Theories contain instructions for reading the world and acting in it.” (Anderson, 1996)

“[A theory is] any organized set of concepts, explanations, and principles of some aspect of human experience.” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008)

“The primary goal in studying communication theory should be the discovery of common patterns of thought that will provide broader and more useful theoretical structures. Behavior can be both understood and improved through systematic study. Theory is a tentative explanation invented to assist in understanding some small or large part of the “reality” around us. Ideally, theoretical concepts are measurable and propositions testable and therefore subject to refutation. A theory comes into prominence when it is noticed and pursued by the scientific community, and it passes into history when better explanations are found.” (Donohew & Palmgreen, 2003)

Course Description
This required graduate seminar provides an examination and critical analysis of the major theories of communication processes, including systems theory, structural theories and semiotics, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, theories of the social construction of reality, and other theoretical approaches to the study of communication. As such, this course involves the excavation, critical analysis, and where necessary, deconstruction of the philosophical building blocks and metatheoretical assumptions that form the foundations of various approaches to the construction of theories, methods, and arguments used to support claims to truth in the study of communication. The course will be framed with discussions of the
differences and/or similarities among these approaches in terms of their take on epistemology, ontology, praxeology, and axiology. First, we will answer questions such as, “What is a theory? and “How are theories that explain or predict elements of the phenomenal world, created?” Once we have the tools to examine and evaluate these theories, we will investigate the history and development of theoretical work in mass communication, interpersonal communication, and other applied communication contexts.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of communication theory from multiple philosophical perspectives including the specific influences of various epistemic traditions and schools of thought on the development of theories used in communication research.
2. Trace the historical development, conceptual framework, and current status of several key communication theories in multiple contexts (e.g., interpersonal, mass, health, group, organizational, cultural) from major philosophical perspectives.
3. Relate theory and research methods, including standards for evaluation and analysis of theories through discussion and critique of current communication theories.
4. Utilize the vocabulary of and ethics regarding the study of communication theory.
5. Analyze and critique theory at a high level, using appropriate criteria.
6. Begin thinking about ways to integrate new philosophical and/or theoretical insights into the current body of knowledge that constitutes individual fields of specialization.

Readings

All the readings for this class will be provided through Canvas. Whenever possible, these files will be PDFs so that you can view them on a laptop, iPad, etc. or to print them.

Recommended Texts


You are also highly encouraged to have access to at least one communication theory textbook. Such textbooks are handy for providing an initial overview of a theory, a refresher of a context, or an alternative explanation when an article’s language becomes unwieldy. Some textbooks that I have found helpful are:

Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (20XX). *Theories of human communication*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland. (Any of the last few editions of this book would be fine as a reference)


**Course Structure**
This class is conducted using a variety of methods. Lecture, discussion, exercises, small group work, and of course the reading for each class and student presentations all will be utilized to learn this material. The focus, however, will be on discussion. In order to achieve the goals of this course, you must actively participate in the classroom discussions of the material.

**Assignments and Grading**

**Examinations**
There will be a midterm exam and a final exam for this course. The midterm exam will focus on testing your ability to articulate the concepts regarding theory-building that we will be covering in the early part of the semester. The final exam will focus on your understanding of the various communication theories we discuss in the later part of the semester. Both examinations will be of the “take-home” variety.

*Midterm Examination (200 points)*
A take-home midterm examination will be provided no later than **September 28, 2015**. Students will be given at least two weeks to complete the exam that consists of a series of short answer and essay questions (based on class readings). The midterm exam will assess synthesis, application, and evaluation of foundational course content. The midterm examination is due on **October 19, 2015**.

*Final Paper: “Origins, Development, and Critical Review of Literature Related to a Key Communication Theory” (400 points)*
The term paper is a detailed critical review of literature that presents the origins and traces the development of a prominent communication theory. The theory should be associated with one of the content areas that we will examine in this course. Your chosen theory must have been tested and published in literature specifically associated with the communication discipline. Your final paper should be appropriate for presentation at the meetings of a national, regional, or state communication association and should also conform to the follow guidelines:

A. Papers should be of convention-submission quality and approximately 18-22 pages in length (excluding references).

B. Papers should follow APA (6th ed.) style and format.
C. A 1-2 page summary/overview/progress report is due no later than **November 9.**
D. The final manuscript is due **December 14.**
E. While the content of your literature review/critical essay is its most important feature, grading will also take into account such matters as spelling, grammar, punctuation, form, and style.

**Presentations**

*Theory/Reading Summary {100 points -- 50 Written Document; 50 Oral Presentation}*
Each student will be assigned some theories and/or readings to present to the class. The summary for distribution to the class should be limited to no more than two pages (one page front and back) and include: 1) theory name, primary theorist, and date 2) brief abstract of theory with all relevant tenets, 3) recommended resource, 4) applicable tradition with explanation (Craig, 1999), 5) metatheoretical assumptions, 6) graphical representation of the theory, 7) application, 8) possible implications for 21st century communication scholars, and 9) a brief critique of the theory or reading.

*Communication Context Overview {200 points—100 points Written Document; 100 points Oral Presentation}*
Students will work in teams (established in consultation with the professor) to prepare and present a 4-5 page collaborative context overview of a major content area (context) and four of the most exciting/salient/popular communication theories within the context. The overviews will include 1) a summary description of the context, 2) a rationale for why the context is important, 3) how the context has been or is currently being studied, 4) the primary methods, 5) the most important researchers within the context (complete with source of doctoral granting institution and current affiliation), 6) four of the most important theories related to the context (with relevant annotated bibliography), 7) the future of theory development within the context, 8) conference and publication outlets, 9) notable graduate programs, and 10) an annotated bibliography of the three or four most important articles/handbook chapters/ or other references that an interested communication scholar should read if they only had time to read three or four articles. Further, each team will give an oral presentation as part of a panel and will distribute their 4-5 page overviews to the class. These presentations must be ORIGINAL.

**Informed Participation and Attendance (100 points)**

Attendance is required at all sessions of this course. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please contact me to find out what you have missed. We will move rather quickly through this course, and missing just one class may put you very far behind. Informed participation is also required at all sessions of the class. This participation is evaluated in two ways. First, you will turn in a one-page report containing a one-paragraph summary of each of the readings for the week, and two provocative questions that the readings raised for you in
the context of this course. Second, your comments, questions, and analysis during class discussion will be used to evaluate informed participation.

Course Evaluation
I hope grades will not be emphasized in this course as the major reinforcement for which graduate students are to strive. At the same time I realize that grades do hold contingencies for you and, therefore, I will make every effort to be as objective, impartial, and fair as possible. In keeping with this goal, I solicit your involvement and feedback. Paper grades will be reduced by 10% for each day it is late. Points will be distributed in the following manner:

**Written Assignments**
Reading Summary 50 points
Midterm Examination 200 points
Communication Context Overview 100 points
Final Paper – Literature Review & Critical Analysis 400 points

**In-Class Presentations**
Reading Summary Presentation 50 points
Communication Context Overview Presentation 100 points
Attendance/In-class Participation 100 points

**Total Points** 1000 Points

Grades will be administered using the standard 90% = A, 80% = B, 70% = C. Specifically, 1000 – 900 = A, 899 - 800 = B, and 799 - 700 = C, Less than 700 = E.

Incompletes
Periodically, students ask to take an incomplete in a course in order to have additional time to complete course requirements. As a general rule, I do not give incompletes. However, extenuating circumstances (e.g., a serious illness in the last week of the semester) may warrant an exception, although incompletes will still be a last resort and will come with a very specific timeline for completion. These exceptions must be discussed with the instructor and should not be presumed to be available. Failure to complete assignments or to take advantage of opportunities for assistance throughout the semester does not warrant an incomplete.

Academic Integrity
Per university policy, students shall not plagiarize, cheat, or falsify or misuse academic records. Students are expected to adhere to University policy on cheating and plagiarism in all courses. The minimum penalty for a first offense is a zero on the assignment on which the offense occurred. If the offense is considered severe or the student has other academic offenses on their record, more serious penalties, up to suspension from the university may be imposed.
Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct. Each student is advised to become familiar with the various forms of academic dishonesty as explained in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Complete information can be found at the following website: [http://www.uky.edu/Ombud](http://www.uky.edu/Ombud). A plea of ignorance is not acceptable as a defense against the charge of academic dishonesty. It is important that you review this information as all ideas borrowed from others need to be properly credited.

Part II of *Student Rights and Responsibilities* (available online [http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html](http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html)) states that all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about the question of plagiarism involving their own work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission.

When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else’s work, whether it be a published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or something similar to this. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work, which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, the student, and the student alone must do it. When a student’s assignment involves research in outside sources of information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these Rules shall apply to those ideas, which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain (Section 6.3.1).

**Please note:** Any assignment you turn in may be electronically checked for plagiarism.

**Special Situations**
If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible during scheduled office hours. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center (Room 2, Alumni Gym, 257-2754, email address: jkarnes@email.uky.edu) for
coordination of campus disability services available to students with disabilities. Even if you do not think you will need to take advantage of accommodations, it is better to make the arrangements in advance and not need them; last minute requests for accommodations may not be met.

**Fairness Policy**
The University of Kentucky is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. UK does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, or disability. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

**Absences**
I anticipate that you will be in class for each of our meetings. However, I do recognize that circumstances beyond your control may interfere with your attendance. The short version of the attendance policy: come to class and contact me as soon as possible when you do need to miss class; plan to submit work early if necessary.

Students need to notify the professor of absences prior to class when possible. S.R. 5.2.4.2 defines the following as acceptable reasons for excused absences: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of family member, (c) University-related trips, (d) major religious holidays, and (e) other circumstances found to fit “reasonable cause for nonattendance” by the professor. Students anticipating an absence for major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day in the semester to add a class. Information regarding dates of major religious holidays may be obtained through the religious liaison, Mr. Jake Karnes (859-257-2754). Students may be asked to verify their absences in order for them to be considered excused. Senate Rule 5.2.4.2 states that faculty have the right to request “appropriate verification” when students claim an excused absence because of illness or death in the family. Appropriate notification of absences due to university-related trips is required prior to the absence.

Students are expected to withdraw from the class if more than 20% of the classes scheduled for the semester are missed (excused or unexcused) per university policy; for a class that meets weekly, that means that if you miss more than 3 classes, you are over 20%.

**The Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)**
You have specific rights regarding your privacy and the privacy of your educational records
under The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974. This is a federal law that protects the privacy and confidentiality of personally identifiable information contained within student education records. Go to [http://www.uky.edu/registrar/FERPA-privacy](http://www.uky.edu/registrar/FERPA-privacy) to review your rights. Also see [http://www.uky.edu/registrar/content/ferpa-parentsguardians](http://www.uky.edu/registrar/content/ferpa-parentsguardians) for information for your parents or guardians. **Because of this law, I cannot release student information over the phone or via a non-UK issued email account.**
Schedule
This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activities/Assignments due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Aug. 31</td>
<td>Introductions and review of syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Sep. 14</td>
<td>Foundations and definitions of theory and of communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>3: Sep. 21</td>
<td>Metatheoretical assumptions and theory evaluation</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>4: Sep. 28</td>
<td>Relationship between theory and research/practice. Part I</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion, Discussion of midterm project</td>
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<tr>
<td>5: Oct. 5</td>
<td>Relationship between theory and research/practice. Part II</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>6: Oct. 12</td>
<td>Context: Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>7: Oct. 19</td>
<td>Contexts: Group communication and org communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion, Midterm due</td>
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<tr>
<td>8: Oct. 26</td>
<td>Context: Health communication/persuasion</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>9: Nov. 2</td>
<td>Context: Mass Media and effects</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>10: Nov. 9</td>
<td>Context: Online communication/new technologies</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion, 1-2 page overview of final paper due</td>
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<tr>
<td>11: Nov. 16</td>
<td>Context: International/intercultural communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>12: Nov. 23</td>
<td>Context: Instructional communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>13: Nov. 30</td>
<td>Context: Risk and Crisis Communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>14: Dec. 7</td>
<td>Context: Participatory communication</td>
<td>Presentations/discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: Dec. 14</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Final paper due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam week</td>
<td>No exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Readings: This list is tentative and subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and on Canvas

Week 2: Foundations and definitions of theory and of communication


Week 3: Metatheoretical assumptions and theory evaluation


Week 4: Relationship between theory and research/practice. Part I


Week 5: Relationship between theory and research/practice. Part II

Week 6: Context - Interpersonal communication

Week 7: Contexts: Group communication and org communication - Midterm due
Hirokawa et al, (2009). Small group communication In M.B. Salwen & D.W. Stacks (Eds.), *An integrated approach to communication theory and research* (2 ed) (pp. 2-14). Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Week 8: Context: Health communication/Persuasion


**Week 9: Context: Mass media and effects**


**Week 10: Context: Online communication/new technologies**


Quinn, K. (2013). We haven't talked in 30 years!: Relationship reconnection and Internet use at midlife. *Information, Communication & Society, 16* (3), 397-420.

**Week 11: Context: International/Intercultural communication**


**Week 12: Instructional Communication**

**Week 13: Context: Risk and crisis communication**

**Week 14: Context: Participatory communication**