Proseminar in Communication Theory
CJT 651-401: Fall 2011
Meets Mondays, 6-8:30 p.m.

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

Instructor: Dr. Amy L. H. Gaffney
Email: amy.gaffney@uky.edu
Phone: 859.257.9470
Office: LCLI Fine Arts Library 310E
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3p.m.; Thursdays, 9:30-10:30 a.m.

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, 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.

Learning Outcomes
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.
Readings


All other readings provided through Blackboard. Whenever possible, these files will be PDFs so that you can view them on a laptop, iPad, etc. It's your choice whether or not to print the readings but you should have access to all of them.

Recommended Readings

Although not required, you are 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

Our time together will be spent exploring various aspects of communication theory. You are expected to complete readings prior to class so that our time together can be spent extending the readings and deepening our understanding. Given that lecture is typically an ineffective means of learning, this class will run as a seminar. Thus, you will be asked to participate in discussions and activities in class. Be curious, be interested, and be engaged and you will get much out of the class.

Assignments and Grading

Foundations Assessment (20%)
You will complete a series of short answer and essay questions near the midpoint of the semester that will test your understanding of the foundational topics for communication theory. These questions will be focused on the foundational aspects of theory and will require application of these aspects to theories. You will have at least one week to complete the assignment. Your final responses should be typed and will be submitted via Blackboard.

Theory Extensions
- Article Abstract 1 (5%): Early in the semester, you will be assigned an article to summarize and critique based on its utilization of theory. Additional details are provided in the assignment description.
- Article Abstract 2 (10%): Each student will choose a theory of interest and will identify an empirical research article that utilizes the theory; we will sign up for
theories early in the semester. Based on your chosen theory, you will find, summarize, and critique the article based on its utilization of theory. Additional details are provided in the assignment description.

- **Discussion Questions (5%)**: For the theory you have chosen, you will provide a set of at least 3 questions that can be used to discuss the article and its theoretical implications in class. You will post a link to the article on Blackboard by the Friday before we talk about that theory and will submit your discussion questions via Blackboard in advance of class. Additional details are provided in the assignment description.

**Theory Project (40%)**
Throughout the semester, you will work on the relationship between a theory and a context (your choice). Your paper will include a detailed critical review of literature that presents the origins and traces the development of a prominent communication theory. Your chosen theory must have been tested and published in literature specifically associated with the communication discipline. The paper should address (in an order that is logical for your topic):

- The foundations of the theory and how it has evolved
- The context of interest to you
- One or more research questions that explore the connection between your theory and context; the question(s) should be explicitly connected to the literature you reviewed
- A summary (1-2 paragraphs) of methods that could be used to address the question(s).

You will complete this project in stages. First, you will write a brief (2-3 page) proposal that outlines the topic and theory you have chosen. Second, you will participate in an in-class roundtable discussion about your project in order to gain feedback. Finally, you will submit the full paper late in the semester. Your final paper should be appropriate for presentation at the meetings of a national, regional, or state communication association.

**Final Essay (10%)**
At the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete a final essay that asks you to tie together what you have learned. More details will be available closer to that time.

**Attendance and Participation (10%)**
Every student is required to read and critically process each of the required readings for the week and be prepared to actively participate in meaningful class discussions. In order to achieve the goals of the course, students must actively participate in the class discussions of required course material. Participation in class is one important key to learning the skills necessary to be a communication scholar. Your participation should always seek to improve on silence! Your comments, questions, and analysis during class discussion will be used to evaluate participation.

**Grading**
Individual assignments will receive letter grades (A, B+, etc.), and I will weight those individual assignments according to their relative value in the final course grades. The
letter grades are translated much like GPAs are calculated, based on the following translation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.1-3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.1-2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.8-3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.8-3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.8-2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.4-3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.4-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.4-1.7</td>
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**Other course information**

**Analytical Skills**
It is assumed that you have some background in empirical research methods that will allow you to analyze the research literature you will be reading on a weekly basis. If your background remains minimal, please see me for some suggested readings.

**Completion of Assignments**
It is assumed that you will turn your assignments in on time. All written assignments are due by the beginning of class on the due date. All assignments should be proofread carefully before turning them in, and late work will result in a reduction of assignment grade. As a rule, late work will be reduced at least one letter grade. Yes, even being a few hours past the deadline is still late. Excessively late work will not be accepted. Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part OR a good reason for turning work in late. Also, please note that you are expected to complete reading assignments before due dates!

**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.

**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, it must be done by the student, and the student alone. 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 submitted to an electronic database to check 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.
**Schedule:** This schedule is tentative. All changes will be announced in class and via Blackboard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Aug. 29</th>
<th>Foundations of Theory and of Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2: Sept. 12</td>
<td>Metatheoretical Assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3: Sept. 19</td>
<td>Traditions of Communication Theory &amp; Research</td>
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| Week 4: Sept. 26| Evaluating Theories  
| | ▪ Expectancy Violations |
| Week 5: Oct. 3  | Intrapersonal Communication & Competence  
| | ▪ Constructivism  
| | ▪ Symbolic Interactionism  
| | ▪ Coordinated Management of Meaning  
| | ▪ Symbolic Convergence |
| Week 6: Oct. 10 | Interpersonal Communication  
| | ▪ Uncertainty Reduction  
| | ▪ Social Penetration  
| | ▪ Social Exchange Theory |
| Week 7: Oct. 17 | Interpersonal Communication  
| | ▪ Communication Privacy Management  
| | ▪ Relational Dialectics  
| | ▪ Communication Accommodation Theory |
| Week 8: Oct. 24 | Theory-Research Connections, Project Roundtable  
| | Bring project materials |
| Week 9: Oct. 31 | Groups and Organizations  
| | ▪ Organizational Culture  
| | ▪ Organizational Information Theory  
| | ▪ Critical Theory |
| Week 10: Nov. 7 | Media Effects and Persuasion  
| | ▪ Cultivation Analysis  
| | ▪ Uses & Gratifications Theory  
| | ▪ Agenda Setting |
| Week 11: Nov. 14 | Intercultural Communication  
| | ▪ Face-negotiation Theory  
| | ▪ Standpoint Theory  
| | ▪ Muted Group Theory |
| Week 12: Nov. 21 | Elaboration Likelihood Model  
| | ▪ Extended Parallel Process Model  
| | ▪ Sensation-seeking  
| | ▪ Diffusion of Innovations |
| Week 13: Nov. 28 | Instructional and Computer-Mediated  
| | ▪ Instructional Theories  
| | ▪ Social Information Processing, SIDE  
| | Project due via Bb |
| Week 14: Dec. 5 | Looking to the Future |
| Final: Dec. 12 | In-class essay |
Readings* (divided by week)

Some readings may require you to use your UK credentials in order to gain access. Once you have entered your linkblue ID and password once in a session, you should be able to open all files for that session.

*Readings are subject to change; all changes will be announced in class and via Blackboard.


Oct. 3


PDF on Blackboard


Oct. 10


PDF on Blackboard

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946096


Oct. 17

http://spr.sagepub.com/content/7/1/69.full.pdf+html


## SAGE. **PDF on Blackboard**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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### Nov. 21


### Nov. 28


### Dec. 5