“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).

“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).

A paradigm can be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world,” the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts. A paradigm in a scientific field (in this case, a social science field as embodied by communicological, psychological, and cognitive science perspectives) is a coherent set of concepts, principles, assumptions, and basic axioms that have come to be accepted by a sufficiently significant number of researchers or practitioners in the field (Kuhn, 1962, 1970).

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This required doctoral seminar provides an intensive examination of selected topics important to the construction, development, and testing of communication theories.

This course is required for communication doctoral students and is designed for all graduate students who have an interest in paradigmatic issues related to communication theory construction.

GENERAL COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be introduced to the process of paradigmatic thinking to provide a foundation and perspectives for theoretical concerns.
   a. Introduce the four major paradigms used in constructing communication theory (empirical/objectivist, interpretive/humanistic, systems, historical/critical).
   b. Compare the methods and objectives of each paradigm in terms of real-world communication problems.
   c. Identify with at least one of the major paradigms as a personal preference.

2. Students will explicate the historical, logical, and cultural aspects of paradigmatic thinking.
   a. Place each paradigm in its historical context.
   b. Understand how cultural and historical events interacted to produce such paradigms.
3. **Students will identify the major representatives of each paradigm in communication.**
   a. Know specific examples of theoretical writing, both in communication and in general.
   b. Understand the nature of the arguments advanced by specific advocates.

4. **Students will apply paradigmatic and theoretical concerns to a specific area of communication study that will constitute the first steps in defining a dissertation.**

5. **Students will be provided practice in constructing theory and writing theoretical material as related to larger philosophical and methodological issues.**

6. **Students will be familiar with the major issues in communication study and have a good sense of how paradigmatic approaches either help or hinder scholarly work in these issues.**

### REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

- Other readings as assigned.

### RECOMMENDED REFERENCE BOOKS

**Communication**

**Writing**

**Methods/Statistics**

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

This course operates as a graduate seminar. This means that students are expected to come to class having *read and thought about* assigned readings and that everyone will participate in an active and informed manner in class discussions. In designing this course, I have worked with other faculty to identify appropriate course objectives, readings, and assignments and to design the course so that students will leave with an informed understanding of the major metatheoretical perspectives and the foundations and process of theory construction. At the end of this seminar, you should know which perspective you embrace and be able to competently defend that choice.
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Written Assignments

Graphical Models: You will prepare graphical models for Dubin (1978) and Polkinghorne (1983), illustrating your understanding of the authors’ depictions of theory construction and metatheoretical issues. Dubin is due September 26; Polkinghorne is due October 10.

Personal Paradigm Statement: You will write a personal statement describing your paradigmatic position (i.e., you are putting your stake in the ground) and defending why you have adopted this position. Due November 7.

Theory Critique: For this assignment, you will identify a theory you think will be helpful in your dissertation research. You will review in detail the research that employs this theory, analyzing how the theory guides the research; identifying weaknesses, gaps, and contradictions; and discussing how you think the theory will guide you in your research and what modifications/extensions you believe will be necessary for your work and why. Due November 14.

Research Problem Application: Each of you will be assigned a major area of communication research in which you have expressed interest. Using the article from the Journal of Communication special issue as a starting point, identify a significant research problem in the area and then review the literature and determine the extent to which it has been investigated from the perspective of each of the four major paradigms. Write a brief summary of your findings, noting strengths and weaknesses. Due November 28.

Final “Examination”: Think of this assignment as the “take home exam that almost was.” That is, after much contemplation, I have decided I am no longer requiring you to complete this assignment. With that said, I still hope you will “take” the exam. It covers important terms, important scholars, and the major metatheoretical issues we will be covering in class. It distills the essence of this course into one concise document. If you complete it, you will have a handy guide that will be useful to you now and in the future.

In-Class Presentations

Theory Critique: This will be the oral presentation of your theory critique paper. You will have 12-15 minutes to give a polished and professional presentation of your paper.

Research Problem Application: This will be an informal presentation of the findings from your literature review. As a class, we will discuss how each perspective informs each of the research areas, the strengths/weaknesses of each perspective, and the extent to which the approaches may or may not be “compatible” with particular research questions. This is meant to be a creative, engaging, and (I hope) fun assignment.

Class Discussion: Because good discussion is so important to the success of this course, I expect everyone to participate wholeheartedly. While class discussion is not a presentation, per se, it is oral participation and will comprise a significant portion of your grade (see below).

COURSE EVALUATION

| Written Assignments:         | Graphical Models (2 X 50) | 100 |
|                             | Personal Paradigm Statement | 150 |
|                             | Theory Construction Proposal | 250 |
|                             | Research Problem Application | 125 |
| In-Class Presentations:      | Theory Critique Presentation | 125 |
|                             | Research Problem Application | 50  |
|                             | Class Discussion             | 200*|

Total Points: 1000

Final grades will be determined using the standard scale of 90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, 70-79% = C, <70%=E.

*During class, I will be paying close attention to the extent of everyone’s participation in discussion, assessing not only quantity but also quality of participation. After each class, I will assign a grade for your participation on a plus/minus scale to reflect things like the significance of the issues you identified, the insightfulness of your observations, the questions you asked, and so forth. An “A+” will receive 100 points, an “A” will receive 95 points, an “A-” will receive 90 points, a “B” will receive 85 points, etc. These points will be averaged at the end of the semester and then multiplied by 2 to determine the number of points you receive for class discussion. Participation will be graded for all classes except Day 1 (I am a reasonable person) and the classes in which you give your theory critique and research problem presentations.
COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attendance. I expect that you will attend class and be on time for each session. If you have a problem that prevents you from doing so, you should contact me before class begins. If you miss two or more classes, I will encourage you to withdraw from the course.

Writing Skills. I expect that you will demonstrate good writing skills. You should be able to compose grammatically correct sentences, write well-developed paragraphs, and express your ideas in a well-organized, coherent manner. (You also should be able to follow APA [6th edition].) If you have trouble with spelling, grammar, or punctuation, I will point it out to you. I will do so in the most face-saving way possible, but it is my responsibility as your instructor to point out mistakes, so if you make ’em, I shall work with you to correct ’em. This way, you won’t go through life mixing up “stationary” and “stationery.”

Oral Skills. I also expect that you will demonstrate good oral communication skills. You will be making presentations and engaging in discussion of required course materials. You should be able to extemporaneously present your observations and arguments in a clear and concise manner. Your objective will be not only to create understanding with your audience but also to show the relevance of your observations and arguments. I expect that formal presentations will be polished and, if appropriate, include handouts. Problems with spelling and punctuation are difficult to discern in an oral presentation, but if you tend to make grammatical or pronunciation errors, I will point those out to you, as well. That way, you won’t go through life sounding silly when you pronounce “segue” like it’s a hedge, add “ir” to “regardless,” or say “in regards to.”

Analytical Skills. I expect that you have some background in empirical research methods that will allow you to analyze the literature you will be reading. If your background is minimal, see me for some suggested readings.

Completion of Assignments. I expect that you will turn your assignments in on time. All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date or by the designated time if the due date does not correspond with a regular class meeting. All assignments should be proofread carefully before being turned in. Work that is challenged at the level of grammar, spelling, or punctuation will be penalized up to 10 percentage points. Work that does not meet APA standards also will be penalized up to 10 percentage points. Late work will be reduced by 10 percentage points for each day it is late. 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!

Academic Integrity. I expect that you will do your own work. Any student guilty of cheating or plagiarism as defined in the Students Rights and Responsibilities Code (http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html; especially sections 6.3.1 on plagiarism, and 6.3.2 on cheating) will be sanctioned with an E grade for the course.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy. If you have a special need that requires accommodation or assistance, let me know as soon as possible but no later than Wednesday, September 7. You need to provide documentation. Then we will work to make reasonable accommodation so we can ensure you have the opportunity to fully demonstrate your abilities and benefit from this course.

PERSONAL NOTE

I am looking forward to having you in class and getting to know you as we work through our semester together. My goal is for you to leave this seminar with a solid understanding of the knowledge claims and research methodologies of the major paradigms, which will allow you to become a stronger graduate student. The material in this course is challenging (to say the least). Don’t become discouraged! Learning in this course is a process; it takes time for the process to work. To see that it does, I am committed to quality teaching. I will strive to make class time well organized, fully interactive, relevant, and intellectually stimulating. But I need you to commit to the course, as well! Come to class having read and thought about the week’s readings. A class like CJT 751 works only if the instructor and students are fully committed to it. This can be a great experience. Please help me make it so! Along the way, if there is anything that I can do to make this course more relevant to you, your work, and/or your research interests, let me know. Take advantage of my office hours and e-mail. I have an open door policy, and I’m willing to help. Just ask!
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

August 29  
Introduction(s), Background, Overview

(Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-2)

[Chapter 1 (pp. 9-17 only) and Chapter 2]

September 5  
Labor Day – No Class

September 12  
Theory Construction

(Chapters 3-5)

September 19  
Theory Construction

(Chapters 6-8)

September 26  
The Evolution of Positivism and the Original Debate

Share graphical models

(Chapters 9-12)


October 3  
Perspectives on Theory Development

(Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-3)


Bostrom, R., & Donohew, L. (1992). The case for empiricism: Clarifying fundamental issues in communication  


October 10  
Systems and Structure; Explanations and Accounts of Human Action

Phenomenology / Interpretation

Share graphical models

(Chapters 4-6)

October 17  
Perspectives on Theory Development

Babrow, A. S. (2001). Guest editor’s introduction to the special issue on uncertainty, evaluation, and  

Bradac, J. J. (2001). Theory comparison: Uncertainty reduction, problematic integration, uncertainty management,  


Goldsmith, D. J. (2001). A normative approach to the study of uncertainty and communication. *Journal of  
Communication*, 51, 514-533.

October 24  Criticism / Postmodernism / Deconstruction

October 31  Alternative Theoretical Bases for the Study of Human Communication
Halloween: Costumes Optional (☹)

November 7  Alternative Theoretical Bases 20 Years Later  Share personal paradigms

November 14  Critiques of Major Communication Theories  Theory critique presentations
No readings assigned. ☺
November 21  Communication “Theory Debate” Chautauqua


November 28  Future of the Discipline  Research problem application presentations


December 5  Has Communication Research Made a Difference?


December 12  Toward Methodological Integration of Theory/Research

Daly, J. A. (1998). If communication matters so much, why don’t we get the attention we deserve? In J. S. Trent (Ed.), Communication views from the helm for the 21st century (pp. 204-209). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.