

COMM 3210-002, Fall 2009

# Human Communication Theory

(Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 - 10:45, MCOL W100)

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## Overview & Objectives

"***There is nothing so practical as a good theory,***" wrote Kurt Lewin, one of the founders of modern communication studies. In this course we examine several key theories of human communication, assessing their potential to address significant problems in society and our everyday lives. In ***Unit I*** we explore foundational issues including the ideas of metadiscourse and problem framing, alternatives to the traditional linear model of communication, "scientific" and "practical" perspectives on theory, and seven traditions of communication theory that provide different ways of framing communication problems. ***Units II and III*** explore six of the seven theory traditions in greater depth by reading key theoretical texts in each tradition and considering how they can be applied to practical problems including problems of shared meaning, control in relational systems, genuine dialogue, democracy, and mass media effects.

The ***objectives of this course*** are to develop your awareness, understanding, and appreciation of human communication theory as a field of study; your ability to understand, compare, and critically assess theories; ***and especially your ability to use theories creatively as resources for thinking and talking about practical communication problems in alternative, potentially more productive ways.*** Readings, lectures, discussions and activities (both in class and online), three examinations, and an application paper assignment have been designed to assist you in achieving these goals and to assess your progress in the course.

## Readings

**Readings are assigned to be completed in advance of most lectures.** The readings are **challenging** (that is, difficult, in many cases). You should plan on devoting a significant amount of time to reading and studying for this class. As you read, make use of the study guides we have provided for each reading, outline the key ideas and note any points that seem unclear or questionable. (Your reading notes are for your own use and will not be turned in.) Because the readings are difficult it is important to attend the lectures where concepts in the readings will be further explained. Also participate in class and online discussions and come to office hours!

All required readings for this course are available through **Norlin Library e-Reserves** and/or direct links to download files on CULearn. Follow the **Course Resources** link on our **CULearn** course home page for a full list of required readings and download links.

**Note: to access online readings and other library resources from off campus you must install and run a "VPN" (virtual private network client) on your computer.** For further information go to: <http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/research/offcampusaccess.htm>.

## Online Resources

Online resources relevant to this course include:

- **CULearn (<https://culearn.colorado.edu>):** CULearn is your portal to all online resources for this course. We will use it for posting announcements and course materials, online discussions, submitting application papers, and posting grades. You will need to visit CULearn frequently throughout the semester.
- **<meta>discourses | theory <for> communication (<http://www.colorado.edu/communication/meta-discourses>):** Resources on communication theory, including web links, slide shows, papers, suggested readings, etc. Students in previous classes have created content for this website. With the authors' permission, some of the best papers from our class will be published on this site for use by future students.
- **Bob Craig's Web Home (<http://spot.colorado.edu/~craigr>):** Information about my classes and other professional activities is on this website. My weekly schedule is also posted there.

## Assignments & Grading Policy

### Grading Scheme

Grading will be on a point system with the final grade determined by the percentage of total points earned (93%=A, 90%=A-, 87%=B+, etc.). **1000 total points** will be allocated as follows:

- **Unit I exam** - 200 points
- **Unit II exam** - 200 points
- **Final exam** - 300 points
- **Application paper** - 200 points
- **Participation, in-class assignments & quizzes** - 100 points

## Participation, In-class Assignments & Quizzes

**Active participation is the key to learning.** Lectures and readings are helpful but not enough for most students. To foster an active learning environment in this class, we will provide many opportunities for participation and feedback on your progress in the course. A maximum total of 100 points will be awarded for all forms of participation and in-class assignments.

- **In-class assignments:** Short in-class essays, quizzes or group activities will be assigned throughout the semester. Points (usually up to 10) will be earned for each assignment or activity completed.
- **Class participation:** We welcome your questions and comments in class! However, we realize that opportunities for everyone to participate in a large lecture class are limited. To enhance your class participation, we will assign all students to ***in-class discussion groups***. Discussion groups will be asked to ***sit together in class*** to facilitate activities.
- **Online participation (*theoryblog*):** Everyone is encouraged to post comments and questions on our course blog on CULearn. Online postings will often be discussed in class as well.
- **Office hours:** Come to office hours! This is a great way to let us know who you are and what you are thinking about the course, get your questions answered, and explore the material in greater depth.

**Missed in-class assignments will not be excused for any reason and cannot be made up.** However, students who engage ***regularly*** in one or more of the other forms of participation listed above (class participation, online participation, and coming to office hours) may be awarded ***additional participation points*** at the end of the semester if it will help the final grade. Completed in-class activities exceeding 100 total points may also earn extra credit.

## Exams

There will be ***two mid-term exams and a final***. Exams will be ***machine scored multiple-choice*** tests. The final exam will cover selected material from earlier units. We have scheduled regular class days for review and will provide a study guide before each exam. ***A missed exam will result in a failing grade. Make-up exams will not ordinarily be scheduled.***

## Application Paper

***Each student will write an application paper (1500-1800 words).*** The purpose of an application paper is to use a communication theory to analyze a practical problem situation. Specifically, an application paper does three things: ***(1) explains one of the theories covered in this course***, defining the key concepts and presenting the main points of that specific theory, using at least two published sources; ***(2) applies the theory*** to a real communication problem, showing how the theory can be used to frame the problem, understand what's going on, and possibly decide what to do about it; and ***(3) critiques the theory*** in light of this application (optionally, this may include original suggestions for revising or extending the theory or a new theory). The paper must cover all three of these aspects (explanation, application, critique) with ***roughly equal emphasis***.

***"Theories covered in this course"*** means a specific theory covered this semester, such as Carey's ritual view, Barthes' theory of semiotics, or Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the culture industry (see the class schedule and readings). We do ***not*** mean broader traditions of

communication theory such as the semiotic or critical traditions. You must choose **one** theory to apply in your paper. If you are not sure a particular theory is appropriate for the assignment, please ask. **How should you decide which theory to use?** Of course it should be a theory that interests you and that you feel you understand reasonably well or want to learn more about. Perhaps **the best way find a topic is to start by thinking about a real communication problem** that concerns you, and then think about a theory that will help you analyze that problem. The **first main section** of your paper should overview and explain the most important ideas of the theory you have chosen.

**"Apply the theory"** means to use your selected theory to analyze a real-world communication problem (anything from a family or workplace issue to a problem in marketing or international politics). Be very clear regarding the "communication problem" (as you see and name it) that you are going to examine through the "lens" of this theory. You have to be able to say, "This is the problem that my theory helps to understand." In the **second main section** of your paper, describe the situation and show how the theory illuminates aspects of the problem that people wouldn't normally notice. At best, your use of this theory will not just "unpack" the problem, but will further suggest helpful ideas for improving the situation.

**"Critique the theory"** means to present an analysis of the **strengths and weaknesses** of the theory based on your experience of having applied it. In the third main section of your paper, you should clearly name **at least one major benefit** in using your selected "theoretical lens" to understand the problem. What do we gain from using the theory as you have done? On the other hand, you should be able to discuss **one or more limitations**, too, of seeing the problem through this lens. At best, you will, in showing such limitation, bring in **another theory or tradition for contrast** (since it shows what your selected theory misses).

That's the main body (in three sections) of your paper. Be sure, also, to craft a catchy and clear **introduction**, which grabs attention, asserts credibility, and names both the theory and the problem to be addressed, ending with a statement of **your paper's thesis**. The thesis should capture, in one or two sentences, the gist of your application—how you will apply your chosen theory to this problem, how the theory illuminates aspects of the problem that people wouldn't normally notice, or what we will learn about the theory.

And also remember to sum up the whole paper in a **conclusion** paragraph, which re-states (in fresh words) your thesis, recaps the three main sections covered, and ends with something that shows "finality" (you've gotten something done, for now) and a sense of "futuraity" (your ideas have lasting merit and future implications).

Although this is not primarily a library research paper, you must **use at least two high-quality published sources** (usually the required class reading on the theory plus a second **outside** source for additional relevant information). By high-quality sources we mean **academic books or articles in refereed academic journals (either print or online)**. You may also use Web sites, other class readings, lecture notes, interviews, etc., as **additional sources** beyond the two required. Either quote from the sources you cite or just make direct reference to points made in them—but do **use them** to help explain your chosen theory. Refereed articles can be found by searching academic databases such as [ComAbstracts](#). Also feel free to ask us for suggestions. All sources used in writing the paper should be both **cited within the text** of the paper and **listed under "Reference"** on the last page **using APA style**. (See the APA style guide linked to the Course Resources page on CULearn.)

Your paper should be ***well written, professionally presented, and completely free of typographical, spelling, usage, and grammatical errors.*** The ***title of your paper*** (a unique title that describes the contents, not just “application paper”), your name, the name of this course, and the date should appear at the top of the first page. Pages should be numbered.

***Save your paper as an MS Word document and submit it through the SafeAssign link on CULearn*** by the posted deadline. ***Late papers*** may be accepted with a grade penalty at the discretion of the instructors. You are responsible for keeping ***backup copies*** of your work in case of technical problems. Lateness due to computer crashes etc. will not be excused.

***Sample application papers*** from previous semesters are available on the [<meta>discourses](#) website. The students who wrote those papers kindly permitted us to publish them for your use. They are not "perfect" papers, but they are all good papers that illustrate different theories and approaches to theory application. ***(Note: Some sample papers on the website are about theories not covered this semester, and many of the sample papers do not conform to all of this semester's specific guidelines for the assignment. Your paper must be on a theory covered this semester and must follow this semester's guidelines.)*** If you write a really good application paper, we may invite you to publish it on the web for use by future students. Of course, it goes without saying that any paper you turn in must represent your own work. For your protection, ***we keep electronic files of papers from past semesters and use the SafeAssign scanning system to detect instances of plagiarism.*** For information on CU's Honor Code, see below under Policies.

## Policies

### Equipment Check-Out

The Communication Department has equipment that is available for students in Communication courses to check out. Equipment includes laptop computers, digital video cameras, web cameras, wireless Internet cards, transcribers, tape recorders, and more. Please see <http://comm.colorado.edu/tac> for more information.

### Honor Code

Academic writing frequently quotes, paraphrases, or otherwise uses materials taken from various research sources. Writers are ethically required to disclose all assistance received and all sources of information used by following accepted practices of citation, quotation, acknowledgement, etc. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty. Other forms of academic dishonesty include cheating, submitting the same work for more than one course without permission, etc. CU-Boulder has established an Honor Code to promote and enforce standards of academic honesty. Please see <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/> for more information.

### Classroom Behavior

Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. See <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> for information about CU-Boulder's classroom behavior policy.

### Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Our policy in this course is to welcome and respect all students equally. Any student who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. See <http://www.colorado.edu/odh/> for further information.

### Students with Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodation because of a disability, please submit to us a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Contact the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (<http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices>; phone 303-492-8671).

### Religious Observance

If you anticipate conflicts between religious observance dates and any requirements or activities of this course, please let us know well in advance so we can arrange appropriate accommodations.

## Class Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
<b>UNIT I - FOUNDATIONS</b>			
<b>Introduction</b>			
1	Aug. 25	Introduction to the course	
	Aug. 27	Metadiscourse and problem framing	Craig, "How we talk about how we talk"
<b>What is communication? Alternatives to the linear-transmission model</b>			
2	Sept. 1	Linear and system models	Deetz, "Linear or system models of communication"
	Sept. 3	Communication as ritual	Carey, "A cultural approach to communication"
<b>What is theory? Metatheory</b>			
3	Sept. 8	Scientific model	Littlejohn, "Theory in the process of inquiry"
	Sept. 10	Alternative / practical model	Craig, "Communication as a practice"
4	Sept. 15	More on practical theory: The constitutive metamodel	Craig, "Comm. theory as a field" (pp. 119-131)
	Sept. 17	Seven traditions of communication theory	Craig, "Comm. theory as a field" (pp. 132-161)
<b>Wrapping up Unit I</b>			
5	Sept. 22	Review	Unit I study guide
	Sept. 24	<b>Unit I Exam</b>	

<b>UNIT II - APPLICATIONS: PROBLEMS OF MEANING AND RELATIONSHIPS</b>			
6	<b>Semiotic tradition and problems of sharing meaning through signs</b>		
	Sept. 29	Signs & meaning	Peirce, "What is a sign?"
	Oct. 1	Visual semiotics & cultural myths	Barthes, "The photographic message"
7	<b>Cybernetic tradition and problems of control in relationships</b>		
	Oct. 6	Cybernetics	1. Wiener, "Cybernetics in history" 2. de Rosney, "Feedback"
	Oct. 8	Interactional view: Relationships as cybernetic systems	Watzlawick, et al., "Some tentative axioms of communication"
8	<b>Phenomenological tradition and problems of genuine dialogue</b>		
	Oct. 13	Dialogue & monologue	Buber, "Dialogue"
	Oct. 15	Therapeutic relationships and the Buber-Rogers dialogue	1. Rogers, "The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change" 2. Buber-Rogers dialogue transcript
9	Oct. 20	Genuine conversation	Deetz, "Reclaiming the subject matter"
	Oct. 22	Applying Unit II theories	Review application paper guidelines
10	<b>Wrapping up Unit II</b>		
	Oct. 27	Review	Unit II study guide
	Oct. 29	<b>Unit II Exam</b>	
<b>UNIT III - APPLICATIONS: PROBLEMS OF MASS MEDIA &amp; DEMOCRACY</b>			
11	<b>Critical &amp; sociocultural traditions and problems of democratic communication</b>		
	Nov. 3	Marxism & critical theory	1. Marx & Engels, "The German ideology" 2. Horkheimer & Adorno, "The culture industry"
	Nov. 5	e-democracy, Habermas & the ideal of democratic communication	Wiklund, "A Habermasian analysis..."
12	Nov. 10	Networked activism & democratic culture	Best, "Rethinking the globalization movement"
	Nov. 12	Applying critical and sociocultural theories	<b><i>(Application paper due on CULearn by 11:59pm tonight)</i></b>
13	<b>Sociopsychological tradition and problems of media effects</b>		
	Nov. 17	Cultivation theory	Gerbner, et al. "The 'mainstreaming' of America"
	Nov. 19	Framing & Agenda Setting	Entman, "Framing"
14	<b><i>(Fall break – no classes Nov. 24-26)</i></b>		
15	Dec. 1	Social learning theory: Observational learning	Bandura, "Social cognitive theory of mass communication" (pp. 2-11)
	Dec. 3	Social learning theory: Social network effects	Bandura, "Social cognitive theory of mass communication" (pp. 12-16)
16	<b>Wrapping up Unit III &amp; the course</b>		
	Dec. 8	Review: Units I & II	Final exam study guide
	Dec. 10	Review: Unit III	Final exam study guide
Finals	Monday, Dec. 14, 7:30-10:00pm		<b><i>Final Exam</i></b>