

Revised: 1/6/09

Readings in Communication Theory

Communication 5210-001, Spring 2009

(Thursday, 3:30-6:00pm, Hellems 77)

Prof. Robert T. Craig

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Overview

This seminar will develop a critical overview of communication theory. We will explore the history of the idea of communication, issues in metatheory and the structure of communication theory as a field, and a selection of classic and current readings representing major traditions that have constituted the field. In the reflexive view on which this course is premised, the centrality of communication as a theoretical problem derives from communication's centrality as a human problem under current social conditions. The traditions of communication theory constitute alternative vocabularies for conceptualizing communication problems and practices. Each tradition enters the field by appealing to certain commonplace beliefs about communication while problematizing other beliefs. As each theory challenges commonplaces that others take for granted, the tensions among theories illuminate tensions in social practice and the debate about theories engages with ordinary reflective discourse (or practical metadiscourse) about communication in society.

Objectives

This seminar is designed to emphasize the following learning objectives:

- **Communication theory:** Gain a broad overview of the field of communication theory with deeper exploration of selected topics, appreciate the value of diverse theoretical approaches, and begin to develop a theoretical stance of your own that will motivate and guide further study.
- **Close reading:** Develop your ability to read difficult theoretical texts, identify key concepts and lines of argument, and reflect critically on those ideas.
- **Research & Writing:** Develop your ability to research and write a scholarly paper defending a thesis on a theoretical topic.
- **Pedagogy:** Gain insight into problems and strategies for teaching communication theory.

Readings

The following required text has been ordered through the CU Bookstore:

- Craig, R. T. & Muller, H. L. (2007). *Theorizing communication: Readings across traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Other required and optional readings will be posted on CULearn.

Online Resources

- **CULearn** (<https://culearn.colorado.edu>): Course materials and some readings will be posted on this secure website. We will also use it for submitting papers and assignments and probably in other ways.
- **<meta>discourses | theory <for> communication** (<http://www.colorado.edu/communication/meta-discourses>): Web resources on communication theory. Students in previous communication theory classes have created content for this website. Selected papers and other materials from our class may be edited for publication on this site with the permission of the authors.
- **Bob Craig's Web Home** (<http://spot.colorado.edu/~craigr>): On this personal website are materials about my classes, research, and other professional activities. Check my [weekly schedule](#) to see when I am generally available for appointments and meetings.

Assignments & Grading Policy

Your final grade will be based on: 1) seminar participation and presentations (20%); 2) three papers (60%); and 3) a final exam (20%).

Readings and Seminar Participation

Needless to say, all seminar members are expected to attend regularly, complete assignments on time, and participate constructively in our discussions.

Readings will be assigned weekly, usually totaling about 50-100 pages. Students are expected to complete these readings carefully every week and be ready to discuss them. Take good notes as you read and prepare questions and talking points to bring up in class. Pay particular attention to the questions and project ideas in Craig & Muller (2007), which will often be used as starting points for discussion. The goals of discussion are to understand the theoretical standpoints and arguments presented in each reading, to respond critically to those ideas, and to explore the connections among different ideas and their implications for communication theory, research, and practice. Questions, critical comments, good-humored dialogue, and "thinking out loud" are definitely encouraged in this seminar. That is how learning primarily happens in a seminar, and it can also be a lot of fun.

Mini-lectures on readings: Students will be assigned to present 10-minute mini-lectures on assigned readings. Depending on class size, each student will do about three of these short presentations across the semester. The goal is to "teach" the assigned reading in a clear and engaging manner and to stimulate class discussion. Creative use of media and supplementary materials (e.g., physical or virtual handouts) to enhance these presentations is encouraged.

Materials prepared for these presentations will be posted on CULearn before class. (Materials placed on CULearn as file attachments should include your name in the file name. Avoid using punctuation marks in the file names, which can bring out annoying bugs in CULearn.)

Papers

Each student is required to write three, 8-10 page (roughly 2500 words) seminar papers on topics in communication theory. Each paper should demonstrate your additional reading and critical reflection on a theory, theorist, or theoretical issue related to this seminar. For example, if you are interested in semiotics, you might choose to do additional reading on a semiotic theorist discussed in class (such as Barthes), or one not covered in class (such as Bakhtin, Kristeva, or Saussure), or on an issue in semiotics that cuts across theorists (such as the stability of meanings, the semiotics of hypertext, or relations between semiotics and phenomenology). The "Projects for Theorizing" chapters at the end of each unit in Craig & Muller (2007) are one possible source of paper ideas. You may choose to write your papers on different topics or on topics that are linked within a larger project. If a paper incorporates a revised/expanded version of one or more of your earlier ones, the combined paper will usually be longer and should reflect substantial additional reading and/or analysis.

Although each paper should be based on research and reading in the scholarly literature, the sheer number of sources cited is much less important than the quality of explication, analysis, and argument displayed. Each paper should develop a central thesis concerning the theoretical topic or texts reviewed. For example, you might argue that Saussure laid the foundations of structuralist thought, or that Saussure's semiology is fundamentally different from Peirce's semiotics, or that poststructuralist theory has undermined (or failed to undermine) structuralist assumptions about the stability of meanings. The paper should be well organized and carefully written with due attention to matters of format and style and as well as content. Give your paper a unique title that reflects the contents (i.e., not "Paper #1"), remember to include your name etc. along with the title on the first page, and paginate the document. For rules of style, Communication students should follow the current *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; other students may choose to follow style guides used in their disciplines.

Students may choose to collaborate on co-authored papers with the instructor's permission. In such cases, expectations as to the magnitude of the project (in length, depth of research, or other relevant dimensions) will be adjusted in agreed-upon ways.

Papers are due (uploaded to CULearn) no later than noon on the assigned date. Earlier submissions are always welcome. Submit your paper as an electronic document in MS Word for Windows format, with the file name made up of your last name and the month and date (e.g. Robert Craig's paper due February 15 would have the file name Craig0215.doc). Avoid using punctuation marks in the file name.

Papers will be discussed in class on the day they are due. Be prepared to present a 5-10 minute oral summary of your paper as a basis for class discussion.

Final Examination

To be administered during the scheduled final exam period, this exam will be based on a small number of broad, integrative essay questions that will be distributed in advance to facilitate

preparation for the exam. Specific schedule, format and procedures will be announced later in the semester.

Equipment Check-Out

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

Campus Policies

Honor Code

Scholarly writing frequently quotes, summarizes, or otherwise uses materials taken from other 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. CU-Boulder has established an Honor Code to promote and enforce standards of academic honesty. See <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode> for information.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

The policy of 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 information.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disability and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to 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 me know well in advance so we can arrange appropriate accommodations.

Classroom Behavior Policy

See <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> for information about CU-Boulder's "classroom behavior policy."

Class Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignment [C&M refers to Craig & Muller (2007)]
1 (1/15)	Introduction to the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Introduction ▪ Craig (2005)
2 (1/22)	Historical & cultural sources of communication theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit I (all)
3 (1/29)	Metatheory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit II (all)
4 (2/5)	Rhetorical tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit III (all)
5 (2/12)	Semiotic tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit IV (all)
6 (2/19)	Phenomenological tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit V (all)
7 (2/26)	Paper #1 – presentation & discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Paper #1 (due on CULearn by noon)</i>
8 (3/5)	Cybernetic tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit VI (all)
9 (3/12)	Sociopsychological tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit VII (all)
10 (3/19)	Sociocultural tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit VIII (all)
11	(Spring break - no classes March 23-27)	
12 (4/2)	Paper #2 – presentation & discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Paper #2 (due on CULearn by noon)</i>
13 (4/9)	Critical tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Unit IX (all)
14 (4/16)	Emerging traditions: Feminist and nonwestern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ C&M, Concluding Reflections ▪ Ashcraft & Mumby (2004) ▪ Miike (2006) ▪ Wackwitz & Rakow (2007)
15 (4/23)	Emerging traditions: Pragmatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Craig (2007) ▪ Pearce & Pearce (2000) ▪ Russill (2008) ▪ Simonson (2000)
16 (4/30)	Paper #3 – presentation & discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Paper #3</i>
<i>Final exam: TBA</i>		

References

- Ashcraft, K. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2004). A feminist communicology of organization. In *Reworking gender: A feminist communicology of organization* (pp. 111-130). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Craig, R. T. (2005). How we talk about how we talk: Communication theory in the public interest. *Journal of Communication, 55*, 659-667.
- Craig, R. T. (2007). Pragmatism in the field of communication theory. *Communication Theory, 17*, 125-145.
- Craig, R. T. & Muller, H. L. (2007). *Theorizing communication: Readings across traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miike, Y. (2006). Non-Western theory in Western research? An Asiacentric agenda for Asian communication studies. *Review of Communication, 6*(1-2), 4-31.
- Pearce, W. B., & Pearce, K. A. (2000). Extending the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) through a community dialogue process. *Communication Theory, 10*, 405-424..
- Russill, C. (2008). Through A public darkly: Reconstructing pragmatist perspectives in communication theory. *Communication Theory, 18*, 478-504.
- Simonson, P. (2001). Varieties of pragmatism and communication: Visions and revisions from Peirce to Peters. In D. K. Perry (Ed.), *American pragmatism and communication research* (pp. 1-26). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wackwitz, L. A., & Rakow, L. F. (2007). Got theory? In P. J. Creedon & J. Cramer (Eds.), *Women in mass communication (3rd ed., pp. 257-271)*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.