

# COM 760: Communication Theory

The University of Nevada, Reno  
Fall 2019

Professor: Dr. Jenna N. Hanchey  
Email: [jhanchey@unr.edu](mailto:jhanchey@unr.edu)  
Office Hours: M 2-4 pm  
Office Location: Lincoln Hall 306

Course Time: M 5:30-8:15pm  
Course Location: Lincoln Hall 100

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of social justice theories in communication studies. As a discipline, communication draws from theories across the social sciences, humanities, and philosophy, leading to an eclectic mix of theory that is taken and applied to communicative issues. To get a foothold in communication theory, then, requires reading primary texts from outside the field, as well as applications of those texts within the field. Therefore, this course endeavors to provide a basis in critical theories of communication by connecting foundational theoretical readings outside the discipline with their use in critical/cultural studies of communication.

Social justice work in communication is intimately concerned with power. As such, we will be exploring how different scholars have conceptualized power inequities since what is often dubbed “the critical turn” in our field. Students will leave the class equipped with multiple theoretical lenses through which to investigate communicative issues of power, control, inequality, and oppression in our society. These theories will also provide the means to think through how communication can help us to build coalitions and relations that move social structures toward equality, justice, and liberation.

The Student Learning Objectives are as follows. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify major theories, theorists, and problematics animating different areas of communication studies
- Synthesize and evaluate scholarly arguments related to communication theory and social justice
- Analyze communication cases and apply appropriate theoretical frameworks in understanding those cases

## REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1847). *The communist manifesto*.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Carrillo Rowe, A. (2008). *Power lines: On the subject of feminist alliances*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wanzer-Serrano, D. (2015). *The New York Young Lords and the struggle for liberation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yergeau, M. (2019). *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Nuerological Queerness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Online readings on the syllabus or announced in class, which will be posted to WebCampus

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### **Participation**

**100 pts.**

This class is heavily based in discussion, and as such attendance is required. After one unexcused absence, each following absence will result in a 20-point deduction from your participation grade. In order to earn participation points, you are expected not only to be present, but to contribute to class discussion through analysis of the readings, thoughtful questions, and respectful responses to other students.

Classroom discussions offer a unique opportunity and environment to “unpack” complex questions about communication theories and social justice work. Participation will be based on: understanding and application of the readings; how attentive/engaged you are; how well you listen to other participants; how respectful you are of others’ views when disagreeing; and how well the points you make, questions you ask, and ideas you introduce contribute to the overall discussion. To earn participation points, you must read, attend, and contribute respectfully.

In order to participate *well*, you will need to complete the reading. I expect you to come to class having read thoroughly and formed incisive positions and/or questions about the topics being investigated in class that day. Class activities and discussion will revolve around your thoughts and ideas about the readings – you have to *have* thoughts and ideas in order for it to work! That does not mean you have to understand everything you read; we will work through complex concepts and situations in class.

### **Reading Notes** (Adapted from the fabulous Dr. Simone Browne)

**180 pts.**

Starting in Week 2, each week you will turn in reading notes before class. These notes are meant to help you maintain a record of theories and their applications that may be useful for future research projects, comprehensive exams, and/or thesis writing. In these notes, I expect you to address the following four things for each essay and chapter that you read:

1. Summarize each essay/chapter. Make sure to highlight the main argument, as well as the evidence and theories used to support it. Your summaries should be comprehensive.
2. Describe what you’ve learned from this piece, and what you could use in your own research. Did this present a new perspective? Provide a new lens for analysis? Raise questions for you?
3. List key quotes from the text that may be useful in your research.

I expect your reading notes to be thorough, thoughtful, and well-written—this means *at the very least* complete sentences and paragraphs. Each week’s notes are worth 15 points, for a total of 180 over the course of the semester (your lowest score will be dropped). Late Reading Notes will not be accepted.

### **Theory Application Presentations** (Adapted from the magnificent Dr. Joshua Gunn)

**50 pts.**

Once during the semester, you will prepare a 10-15 minute presentation applying the theory for that week to a text, media clip, or current event. Your presentation should include a visual and/or media aid to orient the audience, a description of how the theory for that week helps add a new perspective or shed light on your example, and discussion questions. After (or during) your presentation, you will facilitate class discussion using the questions. The goal of the presentations is to give the class a foothold for further discussion—a concrete example of the theory at work. A sign-up sheet will be distributed the first day of class.

## Final Research Project

170 pts.

The culmination of this course will be a theoretically-oriented research paper, that meets the guidelines for submission to the Rhetorical and Communication Theory division of the National Communication Association: between 3,000-5,000 words (inclusive of notes and references). For this paper, you should choose one or more theories that we have read in the class on which to do more in-depth research, and use to analyze a current social justice issue. As the class is focused on learning communication theory, most of the time and thought of the paper should be spent demonstrating application of theory. Therefore, human subjects research is not allowed for this paper. You may choose to make a theoretical argument about a text, film, current event, social movement, news phenomena, etc.

The final project will include two main parts:

1) Final Paper Proposal (50 pts.)

In the proposal, you will detail the theory you plan to use, initial further research done on that theory, the context or social problem you will be studying, initial research into that problem, and your tentative argument about how the theory illuminates or helps to rethink the social problem. For further detail, see the Final Paper Proposal document on Canvas.

2) Final Paper (120 pts.)

The final paper will be a research investigation into that social problem, expanding on your proposal. A Final Paper Template can be found on WebCampus.

### GRADING

Grades are determined based on the number of points earned out of a maximum of 500 points.

There is no extra credit given in this class, and there will be no rounding or curving of grades. Final grades are calculated as follows:

A	93%-100%	465-500 pts
A-	90%-92.9%	450-464 pts
B+	87%-89.9%	435-449 pts
B	84%-86.9%	420-434 pts
B-	80%-83.9%	400-419 pts
C+	77%-79.9%	385-399 pts
C	74%-76.9%	370-384 pts
C-	70%-73.9%	350-369 pts
D+	67%-69.9%	335-349 pts
D	64%-66.9%	320-334 pts
D-	60%-63.9%	300-319 pts
F	0%-59.9%	0-299 pts

In each assignment, you will earn a grade based on the following guidelines:

A = Exceeds course requirements. Exceptionally well-prepared and executed completion of assigned work, indicating significant effort, individualized creative style, and demonstrating a

- thorough grasp of the material. For written assignments: writing is insightful and error-free; message is communicated clearly; research is exceptional; your argument is creative and nuanced.
- B = Meets and sometimes exceeds course requirements. Student demonstrates fundamental mastery of the material. Work is well-prepared and demonstrates considerable effort. Is distinctly superior to an average or “C” effort. For written assignments: writing is generally effective with respect to clarity, directness, and conciseness; some uneven or awkward passages are apparent, as are a few errors in grammar or punctuation. Research slightly exceeds the requirements.
- C = Meets course requirements. Satisfactory completion of assigned work at a level of effort and competency normally expected of the majority of students (i.e., basic completion, average performance, reasonable effort and preparedness). Student demonstrates minimum mastery of the material. This is average work that fails to stand out in any way. For written assignments: writing is reasonably clear, concise, and direct; uneven or awkward passages are apparent, as are multiple errors in grammar or punctuation. Minimum research done.
- D = Basic course requirements are only partially met. Student does not demonstrate minimum mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates the unsatisfactory completion of assigned work, either through misperceived objectives or the failure to grasp key concepts. This work is below average. For written assignments: The message is not communicated clearly, directly, or concisely. There is considerable unevenness or awkwardness in passages, and work is characterized by errors in grammar or punctuation.
- F = Basic course requirements are not met. Student demonstrates little or no mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates either a failure to complete the assigned work, or failure to grasp key concepts due to lack of reasonable effort. Work is below the minimum level of acceptance. For written assignments: Writing lacks style, content, and format associated with a college-educated individual.

#### COURSE POLICIES

All written assignments must be typed in Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1 in. margins (check these—sometimes margins are automatically set to 1.25 in, and must be changed). Late work on the Final Project will be marked off 10% each day for the first three days it is late. After three days, late work will be given a 0. However, late Reading Notes will not be accepted.

Readings must be completed on the day they are listed on the course schedule. Be sure to read thoroughly, and take notes while reading; some of these readings are very theoretically and conceptually challenging. In-class discussions are intended to *complement* (not duplicate) the readings.

Do your best to approach a text with an open mind toward a given author’s disposition and message. This means trying to understand how and why they are arguing what they are, which is typically more time-consuming than simply comprehending an author’s message. Give each author a generous reading!

Communication for this course will be maintained exclusively through WebCampus. Please make sure you are checking it often for updates from me, as well as readings, assignments, and grades.

#### **Discussion of Graded Assignments**

It is your right and responsibility to take an active interest in how you are evaluated in this or any class. If you believe you have been graded unfairly, please come visit me in office hours to talk about

it. Be prepared to make a well-developed case regarding the evaluation. Your argument must be related to your assignment as presented, and based on how it compares with the criteria for the assignment (not how hard you tried, how you think it compares with someone else's work, or how it will affect your final grade in the class or GPA). Any grade appeals must occur or be scheduled no sooner than 24 hours after but no later than one week after receiving the evaluation.

### **Attendance**

This course is heavily discussion based. Failure to engage in class dialogue on a regular basis will result in a lower participation grade (see Participation above). In order to be excused from a day of class, you must contact me *before* the class, unless it is a case of emergency. Excused absences may include illness, emergency, institutionally approved activities (sports/clubs), and religious holy days (detailed in University Policy below). You must provide documentation for all absences within a week of their occurrence. You will not be excused for doctor's appointments, work, or transportation issues (unless they are emergency related). Coming in significantly late or leaving class early will be equated with an unexcused absence.

You are expected to only miss one class a semester, *at most*.

### **Classroom Behavior**

People and ideas must be treated with respect. I want to hear all voices and opinions—and that includes yours! Please both contribute to the classroom atmosphere, and avoid disruptive behavior that makes it difficult for others to contribute.

In graduate classrooms, one of the most pernicious ways that disruptive behavior happens is through name-dropping. Contrary to what some might think, it is **not** impressive to talk extensively about a theorist or scholar you have read with whom the rest of the class is unfamiliar. Everyone has read things that other people have not. Unless there is a clear tie to someone's specific question or research project, please keep your personal readings to yourself. Useful contributions to discussion will be focused on what *everyone* has read and may competently comment on.

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course. University policies on academic dishonesty (see below) will be strictly enforced. Using the words and ideas of others is borrowing something from those individuals. It is always necessary to identify the original source of supporting information; you must cite the source of any material, quoted or paraphrased, that you use in your work. Proper documentation requires both referencing these sources in the text of your writing, and in a reference section at the end of your essay.

Putting your name on a piece of work indicates that the work is *yours* and that the praise or criticism is due to *you* and no one else. Putting your name on a piece of work in which any part is not yours, is *plagiarism*—unless the borrowed thought or wording is clearly marked and the work is fully identified. Keep in mind that plagiarism is a form of theft. Taking words, phrasing, sentence structure, or any other element of another person's ideas, and using them as if they were your own, is stealing. Simply paraphrasing the work of another without acknowledging the information source is also plagiarism. Merely restating another individual's ideas in different words does not make the ideas yours. **ALL** assignments are to be your original work. Using papers or presentations from previous semesters or other classes, even if they are your own, is still considered plagiarism.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include filing a final grade of "F"; reducing the student's final course grade one or two full grade points; awarding a failing mark on the coursework in question; or requiring the student to retake or resubmit the coursework. For more details, see the [University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog](#).

### **Absence Policy**

It is the personal responsibility of the student to consult with the instructor regarding absence from class as soon as possible. Except as specified in this policy, the instructor shall make the final determination on allowing alternate assignments or whether missed work can be done at a time other than during the regularly scheduled class period.

Students are expected to attend classes in which they are enrolled unless absent for institutionally approved activities or other reasons allowed under institutional policy. Instructors may set course attendance requirements, which may include consequences for absences that are not institutionally approved, but such requirements must not conflict with institutional policies governing student absences. As indicated in [UAM 6,501](#), it is the instructor's responsibility to state course-specific policies regarding late work and make-up exams in the course syllabus.

#### *Absence due to religious holy day observance*

It is the policy of the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to be sensitive to the religious obligations of its students. Any student missing class, quizzes, examinations or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall, whenever possible, be given an opportunity during that semester to make up the missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor in advance in writing, according to the policy of the institution offering the class, if the student intends to participate in a religious holiday that does not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. This policy shall not apply in the event that administering the assignment at an alternate time would impose an undue hardship on the instructor or the institution that could not be reasonably have been avoided.

#### *Absence due to university approved extracurricular activity*

For absences due to university-approved extracurricular activities, it is the student's responsibility to consult with the instructor in advance and as soon as possible regarding the absence to arrange for the completion of all missed coursework. University-approved extracurricular activities are defined as those sanctioned by a college dean and/or the Executive Vice President & Provost, and may include, but are not limited to, intercollegiate athletics, band, drama, forensics, and recruitment. Students who represent the University at such events shall be provided with alternate, timely make up exams, quizzes, or other coursework missed as a result of their participation.

It is the responsibility of the student to arrange for written notice from the appropriate college dean or the Office of the Provost to their instructor of their participation in university-approved

extracurricular activities within the first week of the academic term or as soon as the student is aware of the potential need to miss class.

### *Absence due to illness, family emergency, bereavement, or other compelling reason*

In cases of absences due to extended illness, family emergency, bereavement, or other compelling reason, students should notify their instructors as soon as possible and within one week of the start of the absence. In such cases faculty are encouraged to develop plans and deadlines for students to complete alternate assignments that substitute for the missed components of the final course grade. Faculty have the right to request formal, written documentation in such cases as they deem appropriate.

In the case of extended absence, students should review [General Catalog](#) policies for incomplete grades ([4.2 Records and Grading: Grades, Marks, and Grade Point Average](#)), withdrawal from the university ([4.1 Registration: Withdrawal from the University](#)), or grade appeal due to improper withdrawal ([4.2 Records and Grading: Grade Changes, Grade Replacement, and Grade Appeals](#)). Students are advised to check with the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships on the implications of these actions.

### *Appeal*

Any student who is denied a make-up assignment after appropriately notifying the instructor of a class absence, as described in the policies above, shall have the right to appeal that decision through the Academic Complaint System.

### **Disability Services:**

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or the [Disability Resource Center](#) (Pennington Achievement Center Suite 230) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

### **Audio and Video Recording**

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

### **Harrasment and Assault**

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to providing a safe learning and work environment for all. If you believe you have experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, or stalking, whether on or off campus, or need information related to immigration concerns, please contact the University's Equal Opportunity & Title IX office at 775-784-1547. Resources and interim measures are available to assist you. For more information, please visit the [Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#) page.

### **Academic Success Services**

Your student fees cover usage of the [Math Center](#) (775) 784-4433, [Tutoring Center](#) (775) 784-6801, and [University Writing Center](#) (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom learning; it is

your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to change with sufficient advance notice.)

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
M 8/26	Introduction to Communication Theory and Course Expectations	(1) Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field" (2) Deetz, "Critical Theory" (3) Chang, "Introduction" (4) Ono, "Critical: A Finer Edge" (5) McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric" (6) Ono & Sloop, "Commitment to Telos"	
M 9/2	<b>NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)</b>		
M 9/9	Marxist Theory	(1) Marx & Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (2) Aune, "Marxism After Marx" (3) Cloud & Gunn, "Introduction"	<b>Reading Notes 1</b>  Guest Speaker: Dr. Graham Slater, University of Nevada, Reno
M 9/16	Critical Theory	(1) Horkeimer & Adorno, "The Culture Industry" (2) Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" (3) Gunn & Treat, "Zombie Trouble" (4) Striphas, "Harry Potter and the Simulacrum"	<b>Reading Notes 2</b>
M 9/23	Power, Part 1	(1) Foucault, <i>Discipline &amp; Punish</i> (pp. 1-169, end of the "Docile Bodies" section) (2) Tracy, "The Construction of Correctional Officers"	<b>Reading Notes 3</b>
M 9/30	Power, Part 2	(1) Foucault, <i>Discipline &amp; Punish</i> (pp. 170-end) (2) Phillips, "Rhetorical Maneuvers"	<b>Reading Notes 4</b>
M 10/7	Intersectionality	(1) Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" (2) Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination" (3) Cooper, "Intersectionality" (4) Harris, "Reflexive Voicing: A Communicative Approach to Intersectional Writing" (5) Griffin & Chávez, "Standing at the Intersections of Feminisms, Intersectionality, and Communication Studies"	<b>Reading Notes 5</b>  Guest Speaker: Dr. Kate Lockwood Harris, University of Minnesota
M 10/14	Feminist Theories, Part 1	(1) Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (4) Carrillo Rowe, <i>Power Lines</i> (pp. 1-92)	<b>Reading Notes 6</b>
M 10/21	Feminist Theories, Part 2	(1) Carrillo Rowe, <i>Power Lines</i> (pp. 93-200)  Meet in the Joe 5-6pm, go to Winona LaDuke lecture 6-8pm, "Lighting the 8 <sup>th</sup> Fire: Indigenous Economics for our Future"	<b>Reading Notes 7</b>

M 10/28	Theories of Race and Racism	(1) Bonilla-Silva, "The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism" (2) DiAngelo, "White Fragility" (3) Flores, "Between Abundance and Marginalization" (4) Earle, "Good Muslims, Bad Muslims, and the Nation" (5) Yousuf & Calafell, "The Imperative for Examining Anti-Muslim Racism in Rhetorical Studies" (6) Chakravartty, et al., "#CommunicationSoWhite"	<b>Reading Notes 8</b> Guest Speaker, Dr. Lamiyah Bahrainwala, Southwestern University
M 11/4	Decolonial Theory, Part 1	(1) Hanchey, "Agency Beyond Agents" (2) Wanzer-Serrano, <i>The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation</i> (pp. 1-90)  Strongly suggested attendance at: Luis O. Rosas, "The Temporality of Insurgence: Notes from the Protests in Puerto Rico" W 11/6, 7-8:30pm, Wells Fargo Auditorium	<b>Reading Notes 9</b> Guest Speaker, Dr. Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, University of Iowa
M 11/11	<b>NO CLASS (VETERAN'S DAY)</b>		<b>Final Paper Proposal due online by 5:30pm</b>
M 11/18	Decolonial Theory, Part 2	(1) Mignolo, "Delinking" (2) Wanzer-Serrano, <i>The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation</i> (pp. 91-184)	<b>Reading Notes 10</b>
M 11/25	Queer Theory	(1) Ahmed, "Sexual Orientation" (2) Berlant & Warner, "Sex in Public" (3) Yep, "The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies" (4) Morris & Sloop, "What Lips These Lips Have Kissed" (5) Eguchi & Asante, "Disidentifications Revisited"	<b>Reading Notes 11</b> Guest Speaker, Dr. Godfried Asante, Drake University
M 12/2	(Dis)ability Studies	(1) Yergeau, excerpts from <i>Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness</i> (2) Schalk, "Metaphor and Materiality: Disability and Neo-Slave Narratives"	<b>Reading Notes 12</b>
M 12/9	Affect Theory	(1) Ahmed, excerpts from <i>The Promise of Happiness</i> (2) LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (3) Ritchie, "Feeling for the State: Affective Labor and Anti-Terrorism Training in US Hotels" (4) Cisneros, "Looking 'Illegal': Affect, Rhetoric, and Performativity in Arizona's Senate Bill 1070"	<b>Reading Notes 13</b>
F 12/13 – 4:50-6:50pm	Course Potluck and Final Paper Presentations		<b>Final Paper due online by 5pm</b>

## References

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