COMS 306 Family Communication (4 credit hours)
Fall 2014 T/R
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University of San Francisco

Required Textbooks:


Empirically based research articles (see course Canvas site)

Course Description and Objectives:
Family relationships are one of the most primary relationships in which we are involved, and this course will focus on the central role that communication plays in family life. In this course, we will examine the changing and complex definition of family. We will explore various family forms and examine family interaction from different theoretical lenses. Specifically, we will look at family systems and communication patterns, family rituals and stories, power, conflict, and stress in families, as well as assess the idea of what constitutes a “functional” family. You will engage with a variety of materials designed to enhance both your analytic and experiential knowledge about family communication. Analytic knowledge stems from your understanding of theoretical and written materials and others’ experiences. Experiential knowledge will require you to apply what you have learned to your own family communication experiences. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Discuss the changing definitions of family and recognize the social and cultural contexts in which families operate.
- Analyze family communication according to various theoretical perspectives, including systems theory and relational dialectics.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the importance of communication patterns and rituals in family systems.
- Assess how family forms, conflict, and stress have implications for family communication.
- Recognize communication as a process that both affects and reflects family relationships.
- Evaluate the communication patterns in your own families of origin.

Description of Course Assignments/Exercises:
Possible Extra Credit (TBD): Research is a fundamental component of any social science, especially communication studies, and learning about how we communicate involves learning about the research process. Throughout the semester you MAY have the opportunity to be involved as a research participant in which you would have a hands-on opportunity to become familiar with how research is conducted. You MAY also have the opportunity to attend a research talk in which you have the opportunity to become familiar with how another professor conducted a research project. Extra credit MAY be available for participating in a research project or attending a research talk. This option, however, is dependent on a prior arrangement that you must have made with me before participating in or attending a research event. This option MAY also require you to write a short reflection paper articulating your experience and summarizing what you have learned based on this experience. Details regarding possible extra credit opportunities will be provided to you this semester as they arise.

Exams: There will be two exams in this class: a midterm and a final exam. They will consist of fixed choice, short answer, and essay questions. (135 points each)

Facilitation: At the beginning of the semester you will be paired with one or two individuals to expand upon
the class discussion. During this 15+ minute facilitation you will review an empirically based research article that is related to the weekly readings / theory. The specific dates will be chosen during the first class and each group must meet with me 5 days prior to facilitating. In our meeting, you will share with me what article you have found and read that expands upon the scheduled course reading and discuss what you have planned to share with the class. Each member of the group must meet with me at the same time in order to discuss this. As discussion leaders, your responsibility is to provide a 1 page (single sided) typed outline of the main points of the reading, and then present and integrate the main ideas in a way that promotes active discussion among the class. Ways that you might promote discussion include (but are not limited to): (a) developing an inter-active activity related to the material – have students reenact what it would have been like to be a participant in the study at hand; (b) find a video clip from a popular TV or movie which relates to your topic and discuss how it is similar to or different from the research; and/or (c) prepare 3-5 discussion questions for your classmates to consider and discuss. The latter is very similar to what a round-table facilitator would do at a professional conference. This part of your grade will be determined by the thoroughness of the summary outline, the energy with which the discussion was facilitated, and your command of the topic. A detailed assignment sheet and grading rubric will be provided to you later in the semester for this assignment. (30 points)

Family Interview Case Study (Final Paper): This case study asks you to interview two individuals from two different generations of one family. Each person must be interviewed separately. After conducting each interview and transcribing it, you must formally analyze your data to uncover the family rituals, stories, histories and rules that are used within the family to identify how private information, uncertainty, accommodation, relational dialectics, or coordinate meanings are managed and developed in their family (i.e. this paper must be theoretically based). This assignment gives you the opportunity to see how family members share in developing a collective family identity/culture and apply theories learned in class to their experience. This paper should be 12 - 15 pages in length (including title page and all references). IRB approval is needed before your interviews can begin. (140 points)

Family Interview Case Study Poster & Presentation: A poster presentation is the presentation of research information by an individual or representatives of research teams for the public with an academic or professional focus. After writing your Family Interview Case Study, you will need to design and print a poster that summarizes your research and findings. This poster will be presented for the class, as well as printed and posted for public viewing at an even or all Communication Studies majors to attend. Details regarding this assignment will be provided in class. (30 points)

Methods of Evaluation:
Possible Extra Credit (TBD)
Exam #1 135 points 27%
Exam #2 135 points 27%
Facilitation 30 points 6%
Family Interview Case Study (Final Paper) 140 points 28%
Family Interview Case Study Poster & Presentation 30 points 6%
Class Involvement 30 points 6%

TOTAL 500 points 100%
**Grading Scale:**
The following grading scale will be used in this class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage:</th>
<th>Points:</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
<th>What it means:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100%</td>
<td>485-500</td>
<td>A+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-96%</td>
<td>465-484</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92%</td>
<td>450-464</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>435-449</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86%</td>
<td>415-434</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Superior Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td>400-414</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>385-399</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-76%</td>
<td>365-384</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td>350-364</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>Lowest Passing Work for the Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>335-349</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>63-66%</td>
<td>315-334</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-62%</td>
<td>300-314</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>Lowest Passing Work for Electives</td>
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Please note: Grades will not be rounded up at the end of the semester. Therefore, at the end of the semester if you are 2 points shy of earning a B+, your final grade will be a B, not a B+, because you earned a B. If you have any questions about this policy please ask me about this during the first week of class.

**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

This tentative schedule is designed to give you an idea of what we will be doing during the semester. We will try to follow it as closely as possible, but it may be necessary to make changes at certain times. Reading assignments need to be completed prior to arriving to class on the date listed. Note: *I reserve the right to give in-class pop quizzes and incorporate them into your class involvement grade if I sense that students are not completing the assigned reading.* These cannot be made up. *Any assignments / notes listed in bold and italics are suggested personal due dates; no actual assignments are due to the professor on these dates.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ASSIGN. / NOTES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1:</td>
<td>August 19 &amp; 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome and Introduction to the Course</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LePoire Ch. 1 – p. 1-9 – Defining Family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LePoire Ch. 2 - Family Forms in Our Changing Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2:</td>
<td>26 &amp; 28</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LePoire Ch. 2 - Family Forms in Our Changing Society (cont.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of Family Interview Case Study, Family Interview Case Study Poster &amp; Presentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 3:
September 2 & 4  

LePoire Ch. 4, p. 93 – 101 & 104 – 108 – Two becoming one

Week 4:
9 & 11  
Frisby, B. N. (2009). 'Without flirting, it wouldn't be a marriage': Flirtatious communication between relational partners. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 10* (1), 55-60.


Week 5:
16 & 18  


B&B Ch. 7 – Narrative Theory  AND

Week 6:
23 & 25  

In-Class discussion of Family Stories - tie to narrative research.

Turning points: LePoire Ch. 5, p. 114 – 124  AND  Ch. 6, p. 134-140 – Two becoming three

Week 7:
October 30 & 2  

Interview protocol complete – get

B&B Ch. 2 - Communication Accommodation Theory

Week 8:


EXAM 1 – OCTOBER 9

Week 9:

14 & 16 NO CLASS - Fall Break Oct. 14th

B&B Ch. 4 - Family Communication Patterns


Week 10:

21 & 23 B&B Ch. 6 – Inconsistent Nurturing Theory


Week 11:


Disengagement resistance strategies. *Communication Research Reports*, 23 (3, August), 139-147.


Week 12:

November 4 & 6 B&B Ch. 9 – Relational Dialectics Theory


Write discussion section of final paper

Week 13:


Interactive discussion about final project / Sample poster

Week 14:

18 & 20 EXAM 2 – NOVEMBER 18

NO CLASS – Nat. Comm. Assoc. Conf. / Work day for final paper/presentation – Nov. 20th


Final Paper Due

NO CLASS - Happy Thanksgiving Nov. 27th

Week 16:

December 2 Class Presentation of Family Interview Case Study Poster

Final Exam Period: Tuesday, December 9th @ 12:30 – 2:30 p.m.

Class Presentation of Family Interview Case Study Poster (continued)

Additional Suggested Readings
Primary Family Journals

Journal of Family Communication
Journal of Marriage and the Family
Journal of Family Psychology

Other Interesting Manuscripts


coparenthood: Parents’ prebirth expectations and coparental adjustment at 3 months postpartum. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 16,* 711-733.


Le Poire, B.A. (2004). The influence of drugs and alcohol on family communication: The effects that substance abuse has on family members and the effects that family members have on substance abuse. In A.L. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 609-628). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum


Kirby, E. L., & Krone, K. J. (2002). "The policy exists but you can't really use it": Communication and the structuration of work-family policies. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 30*, 50-77.


**Web Resources for Family Communication Research**

The Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/

Childstats.gov, Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics
http://childstats.gov/

National Academy for Child Development
http://www.nacd.org/

National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/
National Council on Family Relations
   http://www.ncfr.com/

National Institute of Mental Health
   http://www.nimh.nih.gov/

National Survey of America’s Families, Urban Institute
   http://www.urban.org/Content/Research/NewFederalism/NSAF/Overview/NSAFOverview.htm

Resources for Parents, U.S. Department of Education
   http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml

U.S. Census Bureau
   http://www.census.gov/

Violence Against Women Online Resources, Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse
   http://www.vaw.umn.edu/