

**COM 421: Health Communication**  
**Spring 2014**  
**Dr. Patricia Geist-Martin**  
**San Diego State University**

**TEXTBOOKS:**

Geist-Martin, P., Ray, E. B., & Sharf, B. (2003). *Communicating health: Personal, cultural, and political complexities*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Harrington, A. (2008). *The cure within: A history of mind-body medicine*. New York, NY: Norton.

Khamisa, A. (1998). *From murder to forgiveness: A father's journey*. La Jolla, CA: ANK Publishing.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Health communication is a field of study that encompasses theories, research, and applications of the symbolic processes by which people, both individually and collectively, understand, share ideas about, and accommodate to health and illness. This class is designed to be an overview of significant concepts and issues that have emerged in health communication scholarship. The sources for this scholarship are interdisciplinary, but the core of our attention will be focused on the communicative implications of health beliefs, practices, and policies, with special emphasis on the question of what should be the core communication competencies of a health citizen. I have divided the course content into four major sections: social construction of health and illness, the clinical context of communication, public health campaigns, and healing ourselves: communicating across the life span. You are being asked to work with a community organization to negotiate an applied communication project that will culminate in a written paper and an oral presentation due at the end of the semester. Our objective will be to produce papers of high quality that can be submitted for conference presentations.

Students' participation in course assignments posted to blackboard may be used for research purposes. If you have any objections to the use of material you have written about the course on your blog, podcast, or written assignments, please notify me.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Participation (225 points)**

Much of the learning that occurs here will be dependent upon the quality of class discussion. Assigned readings will be completed before each class and you will come prepared with your answers to a set of reading questions (200 points). Since a class is only as good as the totality of contributions that occur within it, I encourage everyone's active participation in terms of raising questions, making observations, sharing insights, providing feedback to your colleagues.

## **Reading Questions**

The reading questions are posted on blackboard under Assignments. You are to answer the questions and bring them with you to class the FIRST day we discuss that chapter (11 @ 15 pts each = 165 pts; The Cure Within = 30 pts; From murder to forgiveness = 30 pts. If you are not in class, on time, you cannot receive credit for that week's readings. Reading questions will not be accepted once I have begun the class.

- You must hand your questions to me personally at the beginning of class.
- You cannot send your questions with someone else.
- You cannot send your answers to me via e-mail.

You can still earn an A if you do not turn in one of the reading questions (except The Cure Within or From Murder to Forgiveness questions).

## **Midterm and Final Examinations (350 points)**

Both exams will include multiple choice questions. The reading questions will guide you in studying for the examinations. The form needed for both exams is F-289PAR. You will need the full sheet for both the midterm and the final. It is a red form. Please note that exams in this class will not be returned. However, you are welcome to make an appointment to see and review your exam. All exams will be destroyed at the end of the following semester.

## **Applied Project (500 points)**

*"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give"* - Winston Churchill

This semester, students in this class, working in groups, will be involved in a community based serviced learning project with the Tariq Khamisa Foundation (TKF). Community Based Service Learning is an educational experience in which students participate in a service activity that meets identified community needs. Students reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the communication discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. You will accomplish this project working in a group. A series of assignments will assist you in creating a successful final project.

### *Point Value for Applied Project Assignments:*

- 2 Blog Reflections (2 @ 20) 40
- 1 Podcast group conversation (1 @ 25) 25
- 1 Final Project 200
- 1 Attendance at Group in-class meetings (4 @ 15) 60
- 1 Final Oral Presentation 75
- 1 Individual Project Evaluation 50
- 1 TKF's evaluation of your group project 50
- Total Points 500

## **Reflection (2 Blogs and 1 Podcast Conversation)**

Reflection is your tool for making sense of your community based service learning with TKF and connecting it to the academic content in this course—communicating health. Reflection is a process of critical thinking and analysis, stimulating you to consider the broader implications of your service. Through reflection in the two individual blogs and with your group in the podcast conversation you consider what you are learning from the people who work with TKF or who

participate in programs offered by TKF—people whose lives and culture may differ widely from your own.

Reflecting means:

- Posing questions about your community service experience
- Reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of your service project
- Considering the ways your actions and communication affect people in the organization.

The Four C's of Reflection:

- Continuous: Reflection is ongoing, occurring before, during, and after your experience with TKF.
- Connected: Reflection provides opportunities to integrate learning from any of your work with TKG with concepts from COM 421 Health Communication or with your own personal life.
- Challenging: Reflection both supports and challenges you to engage issues by thinking critically, pushing you to pose stimulating questions and to develop alternative explanations for your initial perceptions and observations of your work with TKF.
- Contextualized: Reflection relies for analysis on the context of TKF--the issues being discussed and the settings where they are being discussed. It occurs in various forms (formal, informal, journaling, artistic expression, video) and settings (in the classroom, at TKF or during TKF programs, and with your group members).

***Individual Reflection—Blog*** (2 @ 20 = 40 points)

Two times in the semester, each individual will reflect on his or her experience with the TKF project, using the four C's of reflection and the criteria above. Jon Rizzo will explain the process of posting your blogs and podcast conversations.

***Group Reflection Conversation—Podcast*** (1 @ 25 = 25 points)

Each group will gather as a group and engage in a conversation where the members reflect on their experience with the TKF project AND working together as a group, using the four C's of reflection and the criteria above.

***Final Written Project*** (200 points)

*General Criteria*

- Interesting headings for each section indicating what can be found in that section
- Interesting first sentences to each section
- No quote to serve as topic sentence
- Make reference to appendices in text and state reason for including it (See Appendix A)
- Cover sheet for EACH appendix that includes title of appendix, both centered (e.g., Appendix A, Volunteer Handbook).
- Use APA in citing sources in the text and references.
- Two copies in three ring binders with titles/names on cover and binder

*The Cover letter:* (placed in front, but not part of the paging of the document)

- Thanks the organization for their time and participation
- Describes the parts of the report
- Asks for their feedback on the report

- Indicate generally what the group sees as the personal benefits of working with TKF.
- Cover Page (repeat the cover page placed on the front of the binder)
- APA style
- Engaging title, including subtitle that specifies focus of the project, date at bottom

### *Introduction*

- Engaging first sentence
- State focus of your project related to TKF.
- Relate focus of project to theory generally
- Preview parts of paper and transition to project partnership

### *Focus*

- State clearly the task your group focused upon
- Describe the significance of this task (generally and specifically for TKF)
- Describe the connection between your focus and theory (cite four or more readings from in class and from a current journal)
- Describe briefly what each member sees as the significance of this project for them

### *Project Steps*

- Describe what steps individual group members took to complete the task
- Transition to Project Results

### *Project Results*

- Describe specifically what you accomplished. Itemize these and talk about each point.
- Illuminate and tie to communication concepts in describing each result (tie back to 4 readings cited in Focus).
- Transition to Discussion

### *Discussion: Interpreting and Drawing Conclusions about the Results*

- Reflecting back on these results, interpret what you accomplished and learned.  
How do you interpret what you learned—implications for TKF?
- Describe what remains to be accomplished in terms of your project focus this semester:  
For the next group of SDSU students who might work with this organization? For TKF?
- What was valuable about the project? What dilemmas occurred? (a) How did you resolve them the dilemmas? (b) What was unexpected or surprising? (c) What would you offer as a compliment for the organization? (d) What did you learn about yourself and others, in the process of completing the project)

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**

Week Introductions, Overview of health communication research, the meaning of health citizen.

1 Start reading From Murder to Forgiveness

Week  
2 Discuss syllabus, Assign Applied Projects, form groups.

## Social Construction of Health & Illness

TKF presentation: Guests Azim Khamisa,

Ples Felix (TKF)

Read: Ch 1-4, From Murder to Forgiveness

Week First in-class group work day (15 pts)

3 Read: Ch 5-8, afterword, From Murder to Forgiveness

The context for studying health communication

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 1

Read: "The Day Patrick Swayze Died" on BB

Week PODCAST AND DISCUSSION BOARD TRAINING AT LIBRARY (LL 260) with Jon

4 Rizzo

Illness, narrative, and identity

Guest: Dr. Kurt Lindemann

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 2

Read: Lindemann "Leaky" Masculinities on BB

Week Cultural understandings of health & illness

5 Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 3

Cultural understandings of health & illness

Guest: Dr. Ramona Perez, Prof, SDSU Anthropology

Read: Perez "Challenges to Motherhood" on BB

Week Second in-class group work day (15 pts)

6 DUE: Post Blog # 1 Reflection on BB by 11:55 p.m.

The Cure Within

Read: Harrington, pp. 1-138

Week The Cure Within

7

Read: Harrington, pp. 139-255

## The Clinical/Political Context of Communication

Organizational complexities

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 10

Week Organizational complexities

8 View: Wit

Politics of communication

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 4

View: And the Band Played on

Week Finish: And the Band Played on  
9

Third in-class group work day (15 pts)

Week Midterm Exam  
10

NO CLASS

Attend VIF, 6:00 p.m. Casa Real

## Healing Ourselves: Communicating across Life Passages

Week Beginning Life Passages

11 Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 5

Formative Life Passages

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 6

Week Sustaining and Enduring Life Passages

12 Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 7

Informing the public: Health Campaigns: Go Sun Smart Guest Dr. Peter Andersen

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 9;

Read: Andersen "Go Sun Smart" on BB

Week Ending Life Passages

13 Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 8

Guest: Patty Strunk, Clinical Field Instructor, The Institute for Palliative Medicine, San Diego Hospice

Ending Life Passages

View: Tuesdays with Morrie

DUE: Podcast Conversation on BB by 11:55 p.m

Week Ending Life Passages

14 View: Tuesdays with Morrie

Empowerment & Activism

Bill Torres, Stroke Survivor

Read: Geist-Martin et al., Ch 11

Week Fourth in-class group work day (15 pts)  
15 Question/Answer project papers/presentations

Project presentations. Guests: Azim and Ples

Project presentations. Guests: Azim and Ples

Week DUE: Podcast conversation # 2 on BB. Discuss reflections on what your group members  
16 enjoyed most about (a) the course, (b) the readings, (c) the project, (d) the use of blogs and podcast conversations, AND (e) your recommendations for changes in the course

Final Examination: