

COM 591.01: SEMINAR IN FAMILY COMMUNICATION
SYLLABUS, FALL 2009

Course Description

Advanced topics in family communication theory and research. Topics rotate from semester to semester. May be repeated for credit when topics change. Credit 3. This semester, the focus is **Intergenerational and Cross-Generational Family Communication.**

Class Meeting Place and Time

The class meets on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 to 9:00 at the University Center in The Woodlands.

Instructor

Dr. Richard Bello, Professor of Communication Studies
Office: 322B Dan Rather Communications Building
Office Hours: 11:00 – 12:00 MWF; also by appointment
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Course Objectives

- To gain an in-depth understanding of theories and research related to the life-span approach to communication, especially as it concerns cross-generational family communication or the patterns of communication unique to different generations.
- To gain an in-depth understanding of theories and research related to intergenerational family communication or the nature of communication between those from different generations.
- To share effectively and appropriately, in writing and orally, one's thinking and research about family communication dealing with generational concerns.
- To develop an original research project related to this semester's topic.

Required Readings

Students are required to read works by Pecchioni, Wright, and Nussbaum (2005) and Williams and Nussbaum (2001). These works will be supplemented by several articles chosen by students and the instructor. One of the single most important things you can do as a graduate student of communication studies is to actually read these materials in a timely manner!

Class Meetings and Attendance

Attendance is absolutely essential because the course process depends largely on discussions of topics that are prepared and led by students themselves. There will, therefore, be a participation grade that is influenced by two criteria: attendance itself and the ability to meaningfully participate in discussions of course material. These participation grades will be automatically lowered by one letter for every absence beyond two. Credit for attendance depends on students arriving to class on time and staying for the entire time the class meets.

Class Procedure

There will occasionally be mini-lectures by the instructor that deal with especially important or complex topics. However, the majority of class time will be taken up by presentations and discussions that are prepared and led by individual students.

Projects and Grading Policy

Most significant to this course will be a research paper that is 12 to 20 pages long. You may choose from one of two assignments. The first involves the actual conduct of a pilot study in which you do a relatively brief literature review of a generational communication topic that leads logically to a set of hypotheses and/or research questions, report on the methodology used to collect data, report the results, and finally conclude with a brief discussion of those results. Note: IRB approval will absolutely be required for the completion of this assignment! The key focus here is on the original research that you do, so it is the quality of your basic concept, the validity of your design and measurements, the appropriateness of your data analysis, and the write up of the results that will primarily determine this paper's grade. (This choice is probably best for someone who enjoys thinking creatively and who gets excited at the prospect of doing original research. However, it is not for the faint of heart, in part because it will involve the use of [gasp!] statistics in the process of completing that research.)

The second choice is to write an exhaustive literature review on a generational communication topic, pose a set of hypotheses and/or research questions, and conclude with a brief discussion of how you might go about testing the hypotheses or answering the questions posed. (For those of you who took Advanced Interpersonal with me, this assignment is virtually identical to the one required for that class. It is probably the best choice for someone who enjoys the "grunt work" of doing meticulous library research and attempting to analyze and synthesize that research.)

Papers must also be engagingly written, well organized, grammatically and mechanically correct, and follow appropriate elements of style (APA). Students will also present the key findings of their research papers in class.

Another integral part of the course will be planned presentations and discussions led by individual students. Each student will prepare about three of these, each dealing with a separate chapter covered in each of the textbooks. Prepare a two to three page outline of the chapter and bring enough printed copies for everyone in the class. Also, prepare a set of questions designed to

promote class discussion about the chapter, and be prepared to lead that discussion after your presentation. That same evening, you will also be required to bring copies for everyone in the class of at least one article on an original piece of research from a scholarly communication journal, and will need to summarize orally the basics of the methodology used in the study and the key findings of the study. The article you bring should be recent and should deal with one of the sub-topics covered in the book chapter that you find especially interesting.

Here are some of the *key standards you should be guided by for these presentations*: they must be ready on the assigned date (including the outline), the outline must be detailed enough to study from but must be in *outline* form, the material must be presented conversationally (in other words, *not read*), and presenters should feel free to be creative in terms of their techniques.

Here are the *key standards that class members should be guided by in the processing of these presentations*: the chapter being reported on must have been read by the evening of the report, students should listen actively and attentively, and students are strongly encouraged to ask appropriate questions and make comments that contribute to the discussion in a positive manner.

There will also likely be a comprehensive final exam during the week set aside for finals.

Grade breakdown: Paper 50%, Pres/Disc's 35%, Participation 15% (without exam) OR
Paper 50%, Pres/Disc's 20%, Participation 15%, Exam 15%

General Class Policies

- A. Be on time.
- B. Don't leave early.
- C. In class, turn off all cell phones, beepers, or other electronic communication devices.
- D. Arrive to class rested and ready to participate. Be open and receptive to new ideas--you will hear a lot of them this semester. Questioning your assumptions is the basis of learning.
- E. Project makeups or late papers will be allowed with no penalty only if the student can present written evidence of a legitimate reason for having missed the due date. Minus a legitimate, documented reason, late papers will either not be accepted or, at the discretion of the instructor, will be accepted with a penalty of at least one letter grade.
- F. Plagiarism will result, at a minimum, in a zero for the assignment involved.
- H. If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, please contact the Chair of the Committee for Continuing Assistance for Disabled Students at 294-1720.

Notice: You will find online a more detailed description of these policies at <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Course Outline

8/25	Syllabus and orientation to course
9/1	Chapter 1, PWN; Assignment of presentations
9/8	Chapters 2 & 3, PWN
9/15	Chapters 4 & 5, PWN
9/22	Chapters 6 & 7, PWN
9/29	Chapters 8 & 9, PWN
10/6	Chapters 10 & 11, PWN Paper decisions and topics due
10/13	Chapters 12 & 13, PWN
10/20	Chapters 1 & 2, WN
10/27	Chapters 3 & 4, WN
11/3	Chapters 5 & 6, WN
11/10	Chapter 7, WN Progress reports on papers
11/17	Chapters 8 & 9, WN
11/24	Chapters 10 & 11, WN
12/1	Chapters 12 & 13, WN
12/8	Chapter 14, WN Research paper due
12/15	Final Exam or Paper Presentations

References

Pecchioni, L. L., Wright, K. B., & Nussbaum, J. F. (2005). *Life-span communication*. Mahwah,

NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Williams, A., & Nussbaum, J. F. (2001). *Intergenerational communication across the life span*.

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.