

Comparative Theories of Communication
Communication Studies 958
Fall 2023

Time and Place: M/W 9:30-10:45 AM: 401 Bailey
Instructor: Cameron Piercy, PhD
Email Address: cpiercy@ku.edu
Office: Bailey Hall, Office 6C
Office Hours: M & W, 11 - noon; T 10 - 11; and by appt: <https://go.ku.edu/38tfcv>

Required Books:

Littlejohn, S. W., Foss, K. A., & Oetzel, J. G. (2017). *Theories of Human Communication (11th Ed.)*. Waveland Press.

Course Description:

A descriptive and comparative analysis of theories of communication applicable to speech [sic] behavior. Prerequisite: COMS 859 or equivalent.

Course Format

This is an in person, graduate level course comprised primarily of PhD students. The course is discussion based, and all students are expected to have completed the class reading prior to the assigned day. Classes will feature a minimal amount of direct lecture and PowerPoint, and will focus on discussion of key ideas in the chapters/articles assigned.

Expectations, Requirements and Grading

There are two requirements for this course: (1) Please do the readings to the best of your abilities and (2) Please respect your fellow classmates. If you do these two things and keep up with the work as assigned, you will succeed in the course.

Writing is a critical part of communication, and in order to be successful in this class, it is important that you communicate clearly and concisely in writing. KU offers a Writing Center where students can obtain help with writing skills and assignments: <http://writing.ku.edu/ku-graduate-students>. Students are encouraged to take advantage of their tutoring services before handing in any written work.

Instructor Positionality

I am a young white cis-gender male, and a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I received my PhD in 2017. Prior to coming to KU, I was employed at the University of Central Missouri from 2016 to 2018 as an assistant professor of business communication in a management department. I was trained in Organizational Communication and Computer-Mediated Communication. These days I am trying to focus my work more on Human-Machine Communication (HMC; <https://hmc.ku.edu>) Because of my training, we'll read more organizationally and CMC oriented work than you might if another instructor was teaching the course. But I also feel that organizational communication is uniquely positioned to tackle some of the tough questions in this course.

My epistemological commitments lean towards a social constructivist, relational, post-positivism, though I also use interpretivist approaches. My research is more frequently quantitative than

qualitative, and quite often involves questions about relationships in organizations, especially using social network analysis. As a scholar, I enjoy critical and rhetorical work, but my own research probably would not be classified under these forms of reasoning/knowing. I think you will be surprised to see a fairly diverse schedule that tries to incorporate many ways of knowing, and theories, across the field of communication.

My positionality affects what you will learn from me in this course, but does not change the wide-body of research in communication. As I plan our course, I am trying to strike a balance between what I know and can share with you in great depth, and what I am learning is important to other experts whose paradigm, methods, training, and experiences are not like my own in our field. All this to say, please be patient with me as I share both the knowledge I've gained in my prior training and I explore new and novel areas (many of which you've asked me to include) with you throughout this course.

Ungrading

Your final grade will be allocated between the required assignments listed below. In the spirit of ungrading, a practice designed to center your contribution and the value of feedback, each assignment will be graded only as pass or not. Ungrading values feedback over evaluation—it centers conversation over penalization. I am getting better at ungrading, but it requires a great deal of trust between you and me. Please let me know if you prefer I evaluate your work in a 'conventional' points-based way (I have much experience with this approach). Otherwise, it is my hope you feel more comfortable talking to me about what you hope to accomplish, how you see the work of this class relative to your own career and interests.

For me, ungrading centers your efforts and contributions (varied as they may be across your graduate program) and helps both of us find ways to increase the value of this course by focusing on conversation and growth. The weights assigned below signal that by completing each component you will receive the cumulative percent of your grade. For example, if you choose not to engage in the "Who am I" presentation, your grade for the course will be 90%:

Required Assignments

Who am I presentation? (10%)

This presentation occurs early in the semester, and it is what it says it is. In the first few weeks we will review ontology, epistemology, axiology, and praxeology. We will also overview the seven traditions which describe the field of communication, and the dominant paradigms which shape scholarship. In the process, we'll also overview the history and trajectory of Communication Studies. Following these deep (philosophical) conversations, I invite you to express yourself in two presentational forms: (1) A material form (e.g., a document, art, a slide show, a methods section of a paper) and (2) A presentation answering your commitments. There is no right or wrong here, and you may not yet feel ready to provide the answers, but please try.

Demystifying the Dissertation (adapted from Dr. Loretta LeMaster; 15%)

At some point all PhD students will write a dissertation. This may seem like a daunting task, so this assignment is meant to demystify the process. Please select a dissertation completed by a KU alumnus within the last 10 years (2013-2023) which you think might help you better understand the process. Read the dissertation thoroughly, then contact the author and hold a conversation where you ask them about their commitments as a researcher. Finally, using the dissertation contents and

the conversation construct a 5-7 page paper which describes their dissertation relative to the epistemological, axiological, and praxiological domains of our field. You should also position the dissertation relative to the seven traditions we've discussed. Finally, detail what role theory plays in this dissertation. Keep in mind that the way we study theory and assumptions in class is rarely directly articulated in a dissertation. As you put together this report, make note of how upstream assumptions affect downstream outcomes in the paper. Citations, in a style appropriate to your area, are expected as part of this document.

Theory Expert and Reviewer #1 (7.5% for each role, 45% total):

In three classes you'll be asked to take on the role of a theory expert. In three classes you are asked to take on the role of Reviewer #1. These roles are intended to promote in depth discussion of one particular

1. **Theory Expert** – design a study that uses this theory (and suitable methods). You'll present your study in the form of a Powerpoint or a one-page outline which presents context/topic, theory application, and a brief description of your methods/approach. Emphasis should be placed on articulation and application of the theory. It is expected that these presentations include a minimum of five related citations to the theory to ensure a comprehensive understanding/presentation. You will share with Reviewer #1 the theory you wish to use one week prior to your presentation.
2. **Reviewer #1** – In journal review processes, there are often three reviewers. One with expertise in the method/topic, one with expertise of the topic/theory, and one generalist. Your role is to serve as a theory-insider to comment on the theory expert's work. Notice the label "Reviewer #1" which is meant to differentiate your commentary from that of a generalist, this label also highlights difference between your role and the normative "Reviewer #2" (if you have not heard that term, I suggest a quick Google search.) In class you will deliver your feedback on the theory, noting strengths and areas for improvement relative to the theory development process, just as you might in the journal review process.

Final Product/Paper (30% total): The goal of the final project is simple, use a theory to complete a project. Ideally this product will have utility to your career goals and CV. The product will be agreed upon by the instructor and the student in one-on-one meetings (at or before November 20th). The only requirement is that this is a well-researched and supported product. Here is a non-exhaustive list of potential options for this project to help you consider the possibilities: a training or a workshop with materials; practice comprehensive exam questions with a final paper synthesizing disparate theory; a theory-driven literature review and methods section for a paper you hope to complete; completing a paper you've already started; a grant application utilizing a theory; a syllabus, schedule, and major assignments for a theory course;; a proposition paper laying out key intersections in an area which interests you; or something else that represents your interests and passions. The exact parameters must be agreed upon by the instructor and student, most products will require a minimum of 20 referenced works. You are encouraged to begin work early.

Course Policies

Incomplete Grades

Incompletes are not given in COMS 958. Keep in touch with your instructor if you need to be gone for an extended period. I am here to help you succeed and will do what we can to help you finish this course this semester.

Attendance Policy

This class will follow the [University Excused Absences](#) policy (USRR 2.2.1).

Academic Success

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access. KU is a large campus and finding help or support can be challenging. The Department of Communication Studies has a dedicated committee to focus on IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access). You can find many resources, events, reporting tools, and more on their website: <https://coms-idea.ku.edu>. A large list of KU resources is available directly on this page: <https://coms-idea.ku.edu/find-support>

The University of Kansas has a variety of resources to support your success on campus. In addition to the links below, visit the [Student Resources website](#) (KU Student Affairs) for additional policies and resources.

- [Change of Grade Policy](#) and [USRR, Section 3: Change of Grade](#)
- [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- KU Policy on [Commercial Notetaking](#)
- [KU Statement on Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Mandatory Reporting](#) (Civil Rights & Title IX)
- [Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action](#)
- [Racial and Ethnic Harassment Policy](#)
- [Sexual Harassment](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#)
- [Kansas Board of Regents Statement on Freedom of Expression](#)
- [Student Support and Case Management](#)

Late work: If you are an instructor yourself, we will use whatever late work policy you include in your own syllabus. If you are not an instructor, please take a moment to craft a late work policy that is not longer than one paragraph and share it with me via email at cpiercy@ku.edu. Ideally, we will stay on track with work this semester. If, for some reason, we cannot, we will rely on your late work policy to guide our progress forward. I will talk a bit about why I am implementing this policy in class.

Academic Misconduct: Academic misconduct is a serious offense. Academic misconduct is described in *Article II, Section 6* of the University Senate Rules and Regulations. You are responsible for knowing the standards of academic conduct. The document is available here: policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious offense. 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, in both written work and oral presentations.**

Sometimes writers are uncertain about what to cite. Here are two firm guidelines:

- If you write word for word what appears in another source, put quotation marks around it and cite the source (author, year, page number).
- If you borrow and summarize ideas, arguments, data, or other information from another source, cite the source even if you put the material in your own words (author, year).
- Agreeing with the material does not make it your own; if it originated with someone else, give that person credit according to a formally recognized style. Helpful websites:
 - <http://writing.ku.edu>
 - <https://owl.purdue.edu/>
- Generative AI. Honestly I have no idea how this might be used. For graduate writing, I'm currently advising students to avoid such tools. But, if you see uses, I invite conversation (and certainly citation detailing the model and the prompt utilized). There are probably some uses, so be open to using this tool, but be VERY cautious if you do and document your use well.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings/Assignment</u>	<u>Available Theories; Notes</u>	<u>User</u>	<u>R1</u>
Monday, August 21	Welcome-Overview of OEAP	Miller, 2000; Mumby, 2000			
Wednesday, August 23	Epistemological Differences	Cheney, 2000; Zarefsky, 2008		X	X
Monday, August 28	Foundations of Comm. Theory	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 1; Craig, 1999		X	X
Wednesday, August 30	Traditions	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 2; Craig, 2016		X	X
Monday, September 4	NO CLASS- Labor Day			X	X
Wednesday, September 6	The 'field'	Anderson & Baym, 2004; Walter et al., 2018		X	X
Monday, September 11	Upstream assumptions, downstream consequences	Piercy et al., 2023; Weick, 1989	CCO, Structuration, Agency, Sensemaking		
Wednesday, September 13	This is me presentations!	DUE: Who are you? Paper; Sharp & Thomas, 2019		X	X
Monday, September 18	The Communicator	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 3	p. 92		
Wednesday, September 20	The Message	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 4	p. 138		
Monday, September 25	Materiality	Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2018			
Wednesday, September 27	The Medium	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 5	p. 179		
Monday, October 2	CMC Theories	Walther, 2011	Hyperpersonal, warranting, signaling, etc.		
Wednesday, October 4	Beyond Human Comm.	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 6	p. 216		
Monday, October 9	Adding to Beyond Human	van der Good & Etzrodt, 2023; Dehnert, 2023	Media Equation, Archipelagic HMC		

Wednesday, October 11	The Relationship	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 7	p. 258		
Monday, October 16	NO CLASS - Fall Break			X	X
Wednesday, October 18	Dissertation Reports Presentations	DUE: Dissertation Reports		X	X
Monday, October 23	The Relationship	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 7	p. 258		
Wednesday, October 25	The Group	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 8	p. 297		
Monday, October 30	Group Stuff	Yoon et al., 2023; Zanin et al., 2018	TMS, Systems, SCT		
Wednesday, November 1	The Organization	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 9	p. 341		
Monday, November 6	#CommSoWhite	Chkravartty & Jackson, 2020; Dutta, 2015			
Wednesday, November 8	Health Contexts	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 10	p. 381		
Monday, November 13	Uncertainty and Stigma	Brashers et al., 2002; Meisenbach, 2010; Poteat et al., 2013	URT, UMT, TMU; Stigma Management		
Wednesday, November 15	No class - NCA			X	X
Monday, November 20	One-on-one meetings for final (In person or Zoom)			X	X
Wednesday, November 22	No class - Thanksgiving			X	X
Monday, November 27	Culture	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 11	p. 423		
Wednesday, November 29	Intergroup Comm.	Hogg & Tindale, 2005; IDI Website			
Monday, December 4	Society	Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017, Ch. 12	p. 468		
Wednesday, December 6	Work day (in class)				
		Final product due date: Thur., Dec. 14 10:00 am			