

Sample Syllabus for a Communication Theory course
using the text *A First Look at Communication Theory*

This document was posted at www.afirstlook.com/docs/syllabus_griffin.pdf

NOTE: This was the last offering of the course by Em, who retired in 2003, but kept teaching the course several more years. The 7th edition was current at the time of this course.

Comm 301 Communication Theory

Fall, 2008

Instructor: Em Griffin

Office: Communication First, 386 Pennsylvania, Suite 2 S.E., Glen Ellyn

Phone: 630 790-9364

e-mail: em.griffin@wheaton.edu

Office hours: Tuesday 3:15-4:15 BGC B12
 Thursday 10:30-11:10 BGC M209

Course Goals:

1. To create an understanding of the essential features of 31 current theories that seek to cast light on the communication process.
2. To establish an integrative framework that will provide a context for each theory and show interrelationships among them.
3. To stimulate application of the theories outside of the classroom.
4. To develop ability to research, analyze, and explain a specific communication theory of interest.
5. To raise consciousness concerning the ethical implications of each theory.

Text

Em Griffin, *A First Look At Communication Theory*, 7th ed, McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Website

The *First Look* text is supported by a website at www.afirstlook.com. The site offers chapter outlines, theory overviews, key names, primary sources, exemplars of application log entries, feature film clip suggestions, links to relevant websites, an archive of theories covered in previous editions, “Conversations with Communication Theory” videos, and other aids helpful for students, self-help quizzes and an interactive Question of the Moment. I encourage you to browse the site and participate in the interactive feature.

Course Requirements

Reading Assignments

The lecture, discussion, video, demonstration or exercise during a given class period will tie in with the reading assigned for the day. You are responsible to complete the reading for the topic prior to that class session.

Quizzes

There will be a 10-15 minute quiz at the end of class every Thursday. Each of the 14 quizzes will cover only the reading assignmentx and class activities since the previous quiz. You may skip or discard four quizzes. Because of this flexibility there will be no make-up quizzes offered. I will count your ten best scores. This feature of the course supports goal #1 of understanding the essentials of the theories. (30%).

Final Exam:

The final exam will be given on Tuesday, December 16th, 1:30-3:30 pm. The exam will consist of three essay questions drawn from a pool of seven questions, all of which will be distributed by the end of September. You will be allowed to bring one note card containing up to 25 words for each question in order to help you recall what you want to write. This feature of the course supports goal #2 of understanding the interrelationships among the theories. (20%)

Application Log:

After you read a chapter describing a communication theory (5-35), you are to write 1-3 paragraphs making a specific application of the theory to your own life. Assume for this assignment that the theory has practical value. What insight does it provide to help you understand previous communication behavior? What prediction does it make or advice does it offer for the future? Please type your entries with wide margins that leave room for my comments.

Keep your whole collection of entries securely bound together and bring the entire batch to class every Tuesday beginning September 13th. I will read, comment upon, but not grade that first entry so that you can gain feedback to guide you on future entries. For Chapters 5-35 I will collect a random sample of the logs at the start of class every Tuesday and return them on Thursday. You will be asked to submit your log five different times during the semester. The logs will provide an opportunity for you to show that you grasp the theories' practical implications and can apply them in specific situations. Sample application logs from students in previous classes are on the www.afirstlook.com website. This feature of the course supports goal #3 of applying the theories in specific situations. For Communication majors, this log will be part of your Senior Portfolio. (20%)

Research Project

On September 2nd you will select one of 31 course theories to study in depth. Your choice may be informed by your personal interests, previous familiarity with the theoretical concepts, the fifty-word abstracts in Appendix A, information available at www.afirstlook.com, and your position in the class lottery. The written paper, oral report, and co-teaching role based upon your research supports course goal #4 of researching, analyzing, and explaining a specific theory.

The intent of the project is that you discover information about the theory that is not presented in the text. Pursue one of the following options:

- a. Select an important proposition, construct, or variable within the theory and investigate this portion of the theory in greater depth than my treatment does in the text.
- b. Discover and describe an important part of the theory that I did not include in the chapter. Make a case for its centrality and show its relationship to other components of the theory.
- c. Focus on recent (last ten years) empirical or interpretive research that supports or casts doubt upon the theory's validity.
- d. Explore the intellectual roots of the theory and show its relationship to other theories that we are studying.
- e. Discover, elaborate, and evaluate critiques of the theory.

For this project, draw upon the primary and secondary resources cited in www.afirstlook.com, "A Second Look" and endnote features in the text, and especially your own bibliographic research of peer-reviewed sources. I strongly suggest the use of the Communication and Mass Media Complete database. Not counting the time you spend reading about the theory in the text and the time you spend writing the paper, invest at least 15 hours researching the theory you choose.

Written Report You will submit an 8-12 page paper reporting your research at the end of class on the day the theory is assigned in the syllabus. (The only exception to this schedule is for those who choose one of the Interpersonal Message theories assigned September 11-18. These papers will be due one week after the date in the syllabus.) All endnotes and bibliographic references should conform to the APA style sheet. You should only cite works that you've actually consulted. Attach a log displaying the different times you did your research and cite the specific materials you read during that period of time. The paper will be evaluated on the basis of depth and breadth of research, organization, coherence of ideas, clarity of prose appropriate for a research report, accuracy of information and interpretation, and the extent to which your written presentation conforms to standard best practices of

grammar, spelling, layout, and APA format. This research paper will be an important part of Communication majors' Senior Portfolio. (20%)

Oral report and Co-teaching

At least one week prior to the date the theory is assigned, meet with me to discuss how you and I can coordinate to best present the theory in class. As the student with more expertise on your theory than the rest of the class, you will have ten minutes to make a well organized oral report which conforms to the best practices of public speaking. Consistent with this research project, your emphasis should be on creating understanding beyond that which I've been able to accomplish in the text. Your presentation will be evaluated on the basis of the clarity and accuracy of ideas presented, adaptation to classmates' interest and existing level of knowledge, organization, and presentation. *Note: Don't use this class time to rehash material that students have already read.*

In addition to your oral report, you will be responsible to take a proactive part in teaching the theory. This might include stimulating and/or responding to questions from your classmates, providing examples that create understanding, and soliciting information from me that you believe class members would want to know. In this co-teaching role, you share a responsibility with me to make the class time interesting and productive for those who have already read the text. Your oral report and co-teaching role will contribute to your grade in the course. (10%)

Attendance:

Attending class—both your physical presence and tracking with the discussion—is essential to your mastering the course material. It also contributes to an overall climate of learning. I will note your attendance and involvement in the course and take these into consideration at the end of the term. After determining the grade that you've earned in the course, I will raise it one notch (B+ → A-) if you have attended regularly (0-2 absences) and noticeably participated in your own and others' learning. Conversely, I will lower the grade I report one notch (B → B-) if you have had seven or more absences. Your contribution to the discussion can raise class consciousness of the ethical implications of each communication theory, which is course goal #5.

Grading:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Weekly quizzes | 30% |
| Application logs | 20% |
| Research paper | 20% |
| Oral report/Co teaching | 10% |
| Final Exam | 20% |

CLASS SCHEDULE

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>First Look Reading</u> |
|-------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Aug. 28 | Course Introduction | -- |
| Sept. 2 | Framework for Communication Theory Launching Your Study of Communication. Talk About Theory | 2-12 11-26 |
| Sept. 4 | Framework for Communication Theory Weighing the Words (of Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory) Quiz #1 | 27-40 |
| Sept. 9 | Framework for Communication Theory Mapping the Territory (Seven Traditions in the Field of Communication Theory) Application logs submitted—all students | 41-54 |
| Sept. 11 | Interpersonal Messages Constructivism Quiz #2 | 56-58 97-109 |
| Sept. 16 | Interpersonal Messages Symbolic Interactionism Coordinated Management of Meaning Application logs submitted—Panel A | 59-68 69-83 |
| Sept. 18 | Interpersonal Messages Expectancy Violations Theory Quiz #3 | 84-96 |
| Sept. 23 | Relational Development Social Penetration Theory Social Information Processing Theory Application logs submitted—Panel B | 110-112 118-129 138-150 |
| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>First Look Reading</u> |

| | | |
|----------|---|-------------------------------|
| Sept. 25 | Relationship Development Uncertainty Reduction Theory Sampler of archived interpersonal theories Quiz #4 | 130-141 |
| Sept. 30 | Relationship Maintenance Relationship Dialectics Interactional View Application logs submitted—Panel C | 151-153 154-168 169-179 |
| Oct. 2 | Quiz #5 at 1:15 (No class following) | |
| Oct. 7 | Influence Social Judgment Theory Elaboration Likelihood Model Application logs submitted—Panel D | 180-181 182-192 193-204 |
| Oct. 9 | Influence Cognitive Dissonance Theory Quiz #6 | 205-217 |
| Oct. 14 | Group Decision Making Functional Perspective on Group Decision Making Adaptive Structuration Theory Application logs submitted—Panel E | 219-221 222-234 235-246 |
| Oct. 16 | Theory review, comparison, and integration Quiz #7 | --- |
| Oct. 21 | Fall break—No class | |
| Oct. 23 | Organizational Communication Critical Theory of Communication in Organizations Quiz #8 | 247-249 261-265 |

Date # Topic First Look
Reading

| | | |
|---------|---|--------------------|
| Oct. 28 | Public Rhetoric The Rhetoric Application Log—Panel F | 276-278 279-288 |
| Oct. 30 | Public Rhetoric Dramatism Sampler of archived group and public communication Quiz #9 | 289-297 |
| Nov. 4 | Public Rhetoric Narrative Paradigm Organizational Communication Cultural Approach to Organizations Application logs submitted—Panel G | 298-306 259-260 |
| Nov. 6 | Media and Culture Media Ecology Sampler of archived mass media theories Quiz #10 | 308-311 312-322 |
| Nov. 11 | Media and Culture Semiotics Cultural Studies Application logs submitted—Panel H | 323-333 334-345 |
| Nov. 13 | Media Effects Cultivation Theory Quiz #11 | 346-348 349-358 |
| Nov. 18 | Media Effects Agenda-Setting Theory Spiral of Silence Application logs submitted—Panel I | 359-371 372-382 |
| Nov. 20 | Intercultural Communication Communication Accommodation Theory Quiz #12 | 384-386 387-399 |

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>First Look</u> <u>Reading</u> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Nov. 25 | Intercultural Communication Face-Negotiation Theory Application logs submitted—Panel J | 400-413 |
| Nov. 27 | Thanksgiving—No Class | |
| Dec. 2 | Intercultural Communication Speech Codes Theory Gender and Communication Genderlect Styles Application logs submitted—Panel K | 414-425 426-428 429-440 |
| Dec. 4 | Gender and Communication Standpoint Theory Sampler of archived intercultural communication theories Quiz #13 | 441-453 |
| Dec. 9 | Gender and Communication Muted Group Theory Communication Theory Application logs submitted—Panel L | 444-465 467-470 |
| Dec. 11 | Communication Theory Common Threads in Comm Theories Final Exam Prep Quiz #14 | 471-486 |
| Dec. 15 (Monday) | Optional review session—TBA | |
| Dec. 16 (Tuesday) | Final Exam, 1:30-3:30pm | |