

COM 407: Advanced Critical Methods in Communication

Instructor:
E-mail:

Office:
Office Hours:

WELCOME TO COM 407!

This course is designed to be a senior “capstone” experience. Therefore, this class will be a space where we bring together communication theory, qualitative research methods, and lived experience to examine the ways in which they inform and influence each other and our lives. Throughout this exploration we will discuss the issues of self-reflexivity, ethics, and power. As you prepare to graduate, this course will also assist you in critically applying communication theory to life beyond the classroom.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this course are to:

- Explore the nature of interpretive and critical research in communication studies
- Gain an understanding of qualitative research methods through practice
- Draw and examine connections of course concepts to your lived experience at a community organization
- Understand how communication creates cultures, organizations, and identities
- Study and observe the relationship between communication, research, and ethics
- Study and observe the relationship between power, communication, and experience
- Practice communication skills (research, analyses, writing, presentation)

REQUIRED READING

- Tracy, S (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Assigned Articles and Book Chapters – available on the class Blackboard Site
- 6th Edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association

GENERAL CLASS INFORMATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Be Prepared: This class will provide you with an opportunity to engage in communication studies in a highly personal and experiential manner. **You will need to commit time and energy to this course to make the most of this experience.** This includes completing all readings prior to class discussion, completing all writing exercises in the time frame they are assigned, scheduling adequate time for participation-based fieldwork, and allowing ample time for reflection and analyses of your data. I encourage you to begin organizing and planning your time immediately to avoid problems later in the semester.

Reading/Writing/Speaking: This is a senior capstone class. This means you are expected to have an understanding and mastery of the basic skills required to engage in meaningful research within the communication discipline. These skills include **critically reading** (reading for content) course material, **actively discussing** (respectfully debating and exploring) all ideas presented in class, and **writing academically** (formatted and cited appropriately for qualitative research) about your analysis of your readings, discussions, and field experiences. You can expect that I will come to each class prepared and ready to engage you in discussion, I will encourage you express your ideas, and that I will provide a fun, safe, and positive learning environment where you can confidently display your communication skills.

Attendance: Quite simply, in order to succeed in this class, attendance is necessary. The information you need to complete your fieldwork, write the papers, and pass the exams will **only** be presented in lecture. Therefore, you are expected to come to all class meetings, and it is expected you will be responsible for any material presented. If you miss a class, make arrangements with a classmate to borrow notes. Attendance will be taken for this class. Attendance for each class session is worth a total of 25 points. To receive points for excused absences, documentation verifying the excuse must be presented by the next class period after the absence. Without documentation, received promptly (no more than 1 week after the absence), absence will not be excused. No exception. **If you miss more than 2 full classes for unexcused absences, your final letter grade will be reduced by 20 points for each absence.**

Classroom Respect: I request that you maintain respect for instructors, guests, and one another in the class regardless of different opinions, values, or other group differences. When embodying communication theory and methods, it is not uncommon for very different opinions and beliefs to emerge. This can contribute to an incredibly positive learning experience if we treat our different positions and insights with respect. Therefore, our goal is to create a supportive and cooperative learning environment where our differences can be expressed and explored. Students should give one another equal opportunity for discussion, and practice good speaking and listening skills to help facilitate this process.

Classroom Disruptions: While cell phones, iPods, laptops, and other electronic devices are important channels for communication, they are not appropriate for an academic classroom. Please turn off and store all electronic devices and set all ringers to “silent” (not “vibrate”) before lecture begins. Laptops may be used for taking notes, provided they are used solely for that purpose. You will be asked to leave should your electronic equipment disrupt our classroom activities. Additionally, I do not appreciate (nor do your classmates) people getting up and leaving during a lecture/discussion. It disrupts discussion and it implies you do not value the thoughts and ideas of others. **Plan your bathroom/snack/smoke/phone breaks for before or after class.**

Tardiness: Tardiness is not acceptable. We have a lot of material to cover in each class session, so it is important class discussion begins on time. Late arrivals delay and disrupt our class, and show disrespect to your classmates and instructor. If you arrive more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked as absent for that day. Repeated tardiness will count against your participation points.

Blackboard: There is a Blackboard component to this course. It is your responsibility to know how to access and interact with the Blackboard site. Check the Blackboard site often! This is where course material, discussion points, and course updates will be posted. You will also submit your essays through the Blackboard Safe Assignment system. **NOTE:** I will not accept any assignments via email unless specifically requested.

Due Dates: Due dates are absolute. No late assignments will be accepted. **NO EXCEPTION.** If you must miss a due date for an excused absence, make arrangements with me **PRIOR** to the due date. I am always willing to work with you in advance. **NOTE: Final presentations and exams will NOT be given early. Plan your travel dates accordingly.**

Email: Email is the **best** way to contact me. I check my email regularly, however, due to volume, please allow 48 hours for me to respond to your messages. Likewise, I request that you check your email regularly too, and respond to any messages I send to you with the same 48 hour consideration.

Grade Disputes and Grievance Policy: If you have a warranted disagreement and argument against my grading on a specific assignment, you may approach me to discuss it, following these standards. First, you must wait 24 hours before approaching me. Second, you must approach me, in person, within seven days of receiving your grade. Third, you must have a written list of reasons as to why you believe your grade did not reflect your work. This list should be clear and concise, and should focus on the work, not issues relating to your personal life, etc. I will review your written argument in relation to the assignment, and I will consider your case accordingly.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

NOTE: APA format is required for ALL writing assignments for this course. It is your responsibility to be familiar with APA and use it appropriately. For APA assistance, refer to an APA style manual, or visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

Capstone Project: The main project for this class is the planning, execution, analysis, and presentation of a Qualitative research study. The study will be of your design, and will reflect who you are as a communication student and how you want to apply communication theories and methods in your community. This study will be the culmination of a series of “stepping stone” activities designed to help you progress in an organized, informed, and meaningful way through the research experience. The stepping stones for the project are:

- Self Assessment as an Instrument of Research = evaluating your interests and skills
- Submission of Potential Research Topics/Sites = identifying research sites you care about
- Completed Research Proposal = creating a plan of action for the Capstone Project
- Signed Participation Approval Form = obtaining permission to be a researcher at your site
- Illustrated Site Map = creating a visual overview of your research site
- Creation of an Interview Guide = forming a list of guiding questions for your interviews
- Completed Interviews = (Minimum of 2) conducting interviews to augment your field research
- Completion of 15 Hours of Field Observation and/or interviews (10 minimum hours field observations) and 30 Pages of Field Notes (double spaced) = recording your observations at your research site through reflexive writing
- Creation and Application of Coding Sheets and Data Maps = creating a plan for analyzing your data and analyzing your data according to your plan
- Completion of a Final Paper = writing up your results in a meaningful way
- In-Class Presentation of Project = sharing your experience with your class

Each of these steps will be reviewed in class. Each step fulfills a requirement for the Capstone Project. When combined, you will produce a solid research project reflecting your ideas and observations.

Quizzes: There are regular reading quizzes scheduled throughout the semester. They are designed to test your knowledge of definitions, concepts, key theorists, technical vocabulary, in-class discussions and activities and assigned readings. The quizzes may contain multiple choice, true/false, and/or matching questions. They may also contain short answer questions or graphic elements. **PLEASE NOTE:** All quizzes will be taken through blackboard (except Quiz 5). Each quiz will be timed and you are responsible to complete the quiz **no later than 11:59pm** on the date the quiz is listed on the course schedule below. It is your responsibility to have access to a computer and internet access during the time you take the quiz. Make sure you have any pop-up blocker disabled and that you have strong internet access because no makeups will be allowed should your internet fail or your inability to properly utilize the quiz on blackboard.

Active Participation: This is an upper division seminar which means your **active participation is vital** to the quality of the class. The more you contribute, and the more you bring ideas in for discussion, the more fun and engaging the class will be. I encourage you to actively participate, and participation points are in recognition of the effort it takes to be an active seminar participant. Participation is more than “showing up.” It means engaging the class by asking questions, sharing experiences and contributing to everyone’s success. It also means supplying material to help facilitate discussion and developing a relationship with your instructor. Points will be based on my evaluation of your participation and/or your self assessment.

Extra Credit: There is no extra credit offered in this class. Plan accordingly!!

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade for this course will be based on the following assignments:

Capstone Research Project	700 pts
1. Self Assessment as an Instrument of Research.....	15 pts
2. Potential Research Topics/Sites.....	40 pts
3. Completed Research Proposal	100 pts
4. Signed Participation Approval Form	15 pts
5. Illustrated Site Map.....	40 pts
6. Creation of an Interview Guide.....	50 pts
7. Completed Transcribed Interviews (2 x 15)	30 pts
8. 15 Hours of Participant Observation and Field Notes	185 pts
9. Coding Workshop	25 pts
10. Final Paper	150 pts
11. In-Class Presentation	50 pts
Quizzes (5 x 40 points each)	200 pts
Active Participation	<u>100 pts</u>
Total Points Possible = 1000 pts	

GRADING SCALE

Grades are based on earned points not percentages. **Points will not be rounded** so 899 points will be a B+, not an A-. Extra credit is not available for this class so plan accordingly.

The following is the point breakdown for this course:

990-1000 = A+	870-899 = B+	770-799 = C+	600-699 = D
940-989 = A	840-869 = B	700-769 = C	599 and below = E
900-939 = A-	800-839 = B-		

A grades = outstanding effort. Student goes beyond expectation and demonstrates a superior understanding of course material. Work demonstrates high levels of reflexivity and ethical consideration. Written work also conforms to all APA standards.

B grades = good work. Student effort is above average and demonstrates a strong understanding of course material. Work demonstrates thoughtful reflexivity and ethical consideration. Written work also conforms to all APA standards.

C grades = satisfactory work. Student meets the basic requirements and demonstrates basic understanding of course material. Work meets basic level of reflexivity and ethical consideration. APA standards are met.

D grades = unsatisfactory work. Student does not meet all of the minimum requirements and does not demonstrate understanding of course material. APA standards are not met. Does not meet criteria for reflexive or ethical work.

E grades = failing. Student does not meet the assignment requirements, engages in non-reflexive or unethical research practices, or engages in academic dishonesty. NOTE: these actions will result in an automatic failing grade. Academic dishonesty will result in an XE grade (see the statement of Academic Integrity at the end of this syllabus for more details.)

STANDING INVITATION

If you have questions or concerns about these assignments or any other issues related to the course, please send me an email, or feel free to come to my office hours or set up an appointment to talk with me. **Do not let yourself become overwhelmed by the project.** I am here to help. You are always welcome, any time throughout the semester!

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you would benefit from additional support for this course, I encourage you to register with the Disability Resource Center by contacting them at 480-965-1234 or <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc/>. Thereafter, you are invited to schedule an appointment to see me during office hours to discuss accommodations or other special needs. I will gladly work with you!

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication strongly believe in academic integrity; thus cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated. If a student is charged with academic dishonesty and found to be in violation, disciplinary action will be taken and a student's name will be kept on file. In the Student Academic Integrity Policy, ASU defines plagiarism (as) using another's words, ideas, materials, or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source. Students are responsible for knowing the rules governing the use of another's work or materials and for acknowledging and documenting the source appropriately. This policy can be found online

at: <http://humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/undergraduate/major-information>

and <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>

Disciplinary action may result in the student being suspended or expelled from the college, given an E or XE on his or her transcript, and/or referred to Student Judicial Affairs. For more information,

visit: <http://students.asu.edu/srr/code>

STUDENT CONDUCT

We want to build a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. In a communication class, it is *especially* important that we 1) display respect for all members of the classroom – including the instructor and students; 2) pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities; 3) avoid unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g. having private conversations, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, doing work for other classes, making/receiving phone calls, text messaging, etc.); and 4) avoid racist, sexist, homophobic, or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; rather, it represents examples of the types of things that can have a dramatic impact on the class environment. Your final grade may be reduced by 5% each time you engage in these sorts of behaviors. Further, students who are verbally or physically aggressive towards the instructor, the TAs, or another student before, during, or after class will have their grade lowered by 25% *each time* they engage in this sort of behavior (and, students engaging in such behaviors will be permanently removed from the class and the proper authorities notified.)

Students are required to adhere to the behavior standards listed in the Arizona Board of Regents Policy Manual Chapter V – Campus and Student Affairs: Code of Conduct located online at <http://students.asu.edu/srr/code> and the ACD 125: Computer, Internet, and Electronic Communications available at <http://asu.edu/aad/manuals/acd/acd125.html>

Students are entitled to receive instruction free from interference by other members of the class. An instructor may withdraw a student from a course when the student's behavior disrupts the educational process under USI 201-10 <http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/ssm/ssm201-10.html> "An instructor may withdraw a student from a course with a mark of "W" or "E" when the student's behavior disrupts the educational process. Disruptive classroom behavior for this purpose is defined by the instructor." In cases where disruptive behavior does not warrant removal from class, at the instructor's discretion, a student's final grade will be lowered by 25% instead.

ADDITIONAL COURSE READINGS (APA – 6th Edition)

- Goodall, H. L., Jr. (2008). *Writing qualitative inquiry: Self, stories, and academic life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. London: Thompson Learning.
- Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (1996). A secret life in a culture of thinness: Reflections on body, food, and bulimia. In C. Ellis & A. P. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing Ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 76-108). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Trethewey, A. (1997). Resistance, identity, and empowerment: A postmodern feminist analysis of clients in a human service organization. *Communication Monographs*, 64, 281-301.

A good reminder...

I know this course can appear daunting. Past students, however, have found great pleasure and joy in creating their own study, and applying the knowledge they have gained about communication studies to their work. If you approach this class curious, dedicated, and open to developing new relationships through smart communication practices, you, too, can succeed and excel in this course.

I have no doubt!

I am also here to help you succeed. This class is about you taking the initiative and sharing with us what interests and excites you. I will be available to help you reach this goal. With that, I hope you will jump in, take the plunge (Tracy, 2007), and have fun exploring the amazing potential of qualitative-based communication research!