
CST 207-01: Relational Communication
Fall 2007: Monday & Wednesday 2:00-3:15 pm
Curry 303

"Communication with the Other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run."

— Emmanuel Levinas

"When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object ...Thou has no bounds... When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation."

— Martin Buber

Professor

Dr. Chris Poulos

Office: Ferguson Building # 107

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00-3:15 and by appointment

Contact: cnpoulos@uncg.edu; 336.686.2514 (cell); 336.316.1010 (home, before 10 p.m.)

Department of Communication Studies Mission

We research, teach, and practice communication to cultivate the ethical voices of people that speak in critical, constructive, and transformative ways to identities, relationships, and communities.

Philosophy of Scholarship: We believe that communication is formative and foundational to human identities, relationships, and communities--and that ethical and strategically effective communication can be the means of critiquing, constructing, and transforming identities, relationships, and communities. We engage in communication scholarship in the form of research, teaching, and service that:

- Integrates dialogue and other approaches to communication as the foundation for scholarly inquiry and application to the world
- Cultivates diversity and respect for differences
- Promotes change that leads to more democratic, just, and peaceful relationships and communities
- Engages creative partnerships of faculty, students, and other stakeholders in addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities for improving communication

Course Description

"Contemporary theory and practice of relational communication, with emphasis on increasing awareness of strategic and ethical uses of communication to build relationships" (UNCG Undergraduate Bulletin, 2007-08).

H.L. Goodall, Jr. (2005) defines communication as "a spirit in transit made manifest in voice" (p.1). John Stewart (2006), the author of our text, defines communication as "the continuous, complex, collaborative process of verbal and non-verbal meaning making" (p. 16). In this course, we will explore the meanings, ramifications, and manifestations of these definitions

and the substantial body of research and theory that flows from them, with a particular focus on communication in dyadic personal relationships. We will discuss issues such as: communication and meaning; the development of friendship, love, and intimacy; the kinds and importance of listening; forms of expression; verbal and nonverbal dimensions of communication; relational dialectics; gender and communication; the ethical dimensions of relationships; types and levels of relationships; conflict management; diversity and intercultural relationships; building community; and the construction of the self.

Course Purpose

The emphasis of this course is on practical application of concepts and strategies. Thus, in addition to readings, lectures, and discussions, a significant amount of class time will be spent on skill and awareness building exercises. Students will also conduct observational research, compose essays analyzing relational communication, write narrative accounts of communicative experiences, and present research findings to the class.

Course Objectives

You will:

- 1) Develop and use a vocabulary of interpersonal communication terms;
- 2) Develop a richer understanding of the theoretical and practical dimensions and benefits of both direct engagement in and careful study of communication in personal relationships;
- 3) Analyze your own and a partner's contributions to interpersonal relationships;
- 4) Build a stronger awareness of your own and others' interpersonal communication styles, approaches, aptitudes, and skills;
- 5) Develop/expand your repertoire of communication skills;
- 6) Explore the importance of relational communication in everyday life;
- 7) Develop a clearer understanding of the relationships between communication and cultures, especially the ways in which communication shapes cultures and cultures shape communication;
- 8) Begin to craft your own interpersonal communication ethic;
- 9) Speak and write intelligently about interpersonal communication, with a special focus on the living connections between communication and:
 - a) the coordinated management/social construction of meaning;
 - b) the construction and development of the self;
 - c) the understanding of/responsiveness to the Other;
 - d) the development, depth, and quality of various kinds of relationships;
 - e) the management of conflict;
 - f) the lived body in performance (praxis);
 - g) the development of communicative competence; and
 - h) the social construction of gender.

Academic Integrity First responsibility for academic integrity lies with individual students and faculty members of the UNCG community. A violation of academic integrity is an act harmful to all other students, faculty and, ultimately, the entire community. Specific information on the Academic Integrity Policy and obligations of faculty and students may be found on-line, on the UNCG website at the address: <http://deanofstudents.uncg.edu/>. Be sure to acquaint yourself with the student code of conduct and the academic integrity policy. It is your responsibility to know the rules and abide by them!

Meanwhile, know this: **Cheaters never prosper! Read this:**
http://www.buddhanet.net/bt_51.htm

Course Requirements and Assignments

Reading: All reading is to be completed **prior** to the class session for which it is assigned on the syllabus. For example, before coming to class on Day 2, read: Stewart, pp. 15-39.

Additional assignments are described in detail on the separate **Course Success Guide**, available on Blackboard under "course documents." They include:

- **Class partnership:** An important component of this course is the establishment, development, and maintenance of an in-class partnership. Early in the semester, you will establish a partnership with one of your class colleagues, the purpose of which is to learn about the establishment and evolution of personal relationships, to explore together the content of the course, and to cooperatively complete daily in-class exercises. Your partner is counting on you to be **PRESENT** and **ACTIVE** in your in-class collaborative learning. We will spend some time early in the semester developing contracts for these partnerships.
- **Writing:** Writing assignments are described in detail in the Course Success Guide. You will write four essays. They consist of:
 - **Essay #1, an observation of communication in a public place**
 - **Essay #2, an observation of communication in your family or in your friendship circle**
 - **Essay #3, a mid-term progress report on your class partnership**
 - **Essay #4, your final partnership evaluation**
- **Interview:** You will conduct and report upon one interview, to be conducted with either a long-term married couple or a pair of long-term friends.
- **Presentation:** You will develop and deliver one polished group presentation, on a prominent relational communication theory.
- **Exams:** There will be two exams focusing on terms, theories, key ideas, and application of major concepts.
- **Attendance:** **This course takes a "laboratory" approach to learning about relational communication. Since classroom learning is an integral component of this course, ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. You will earn penalties for missing class. You may miss no more than two class sessions before penalties accrue (your "free skip" days). Each missed class session beyond the first two will earn you a penalty of 50 points.** If you do the math, you will realize that this penalty, when combined with missed participation points, will result in a substantial "ding" to your grade. *Do the math before you ditch.* The only exceptions to this policy are University-sanctioned "**excused absences**" (death in the family; fire, flood, famine, pestilence, enrollment in the witness protection program, illness, etc.). You should contact me in advance—or as soon as you know—if you will miss class due to one of these reasons.
- **Participation:** Our class will be an active, interactive laboratory for developing relational communication skills. Your active participation is vital. Speak up! Offer your insights, ideas, conjectures, critical evaluations, responses to questions, and so on, as we engage in discussion. Offer relevant examples from daily life, the media, the arts, etc., to spur discussion; think and respond actively and creatively. By attending class regularly and actively participating, you will not only be better prepared for your writing

assignments and for successful completion of this course, you will also help make this course a more valuable and enriching experience for us all!

- **In-class behavior:** Please, **no cell phones, newspapers, or lunches** in class. Water bottles with lids are acceptable. (If your cell phone rings in this class, I will confiscate it and spend the rest of the day running up your phone bill!) We will discuss other pertinent class norms on the first day of class.

Disability

If you have a disability or special need which I should be aware of or for which special accommodations need to be made, please see me privately during my office hours (or make an appointment).

Grading

Evaluation will be based on:

Essay #1	100 points
Essay #2	100 points
Essay #3	50 points
Essay #4	200 points
Interview report	50 points
Team presentation	100 points
Exam 1	100 points
Exam 2	100 points
Participation	200 points
Total	1000 points

930-1000 points (93%+) = A

900-929 (90%+) = A-

870-899 (87%+) = B+

830-869 (83%+) = B

800-829 (80%+) = B-

770-799 (77%+) = C+

730-769 (73%+) = C

700-729 (70%+) = C-

670-699 (67%+) = D+

630-669 (63%+) = D

600-629 (60%+) = D-

Course Materials (available in the bookstore)

Stewart, John (Ed.) (2006). *Bridges not walls: A book about interpersonal communication* (9th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

COURSE SCHEDULE

FUNDAMENTALS

August 20

Introduction: Relationships, ethics, strategies, and communities

Exercises: *Forming relationships; course participation/ rules of engagement*

Homework: Buy book! Download and print syllabus!

August 22

What is relational communication?

Communication and the "Coordinated Management of Meaning": Definitions and openings...

Theory 1: Symbolic Interactionism

Read: Stewart, pp. 15-39.

Exercises: *One Way/Two Way Communication*

THE SELF

August 27

Constructing Selves in Communication

Read: Stewart, pp. 63-93.

Exercises: *Getting to know me/you*

August 29

Identity, self, and self-disclosure

Theory 2: Eisenberg's Identity Model: Building a Mystery...

Read: Stewart, pp. 94-106 + 239-247.

Exercises: *Self-disclosure and identity-crafting*

September 3

Labor Day: No class!

September 5

Emotions, Self-Awareness, and Self-Expression

Read: Stewart, pp. 248-260 + 76-83.

Exercise: *Expression!*

Due: Interview report

THEORY AND PRAXIS

September 10

Theory Building + Verbal/nonverbal dimensions of communication

Read: Stewart, pp. 114-137.
Exercise: *Building a Relational Communication Theory*

September 12

Relationship Stages

Read: Stewart, pp. 141-146 + 309-322.

Theory 3: Stages and Social Penetration

Presentation Team 1: *The development and progress of relationships*

Exercises: *Social Penetration, Stages, and Social Comparison: My best friend and my partner*
+ *Values Survey*

THE OTHER

September 17

Listening and Responding

Read: Stewart, pp. 172-188 + 197-217.

Exercise: *Signs*

Due: Essay #1

September 19

Listening and Responding (continued)

Read: Stewart, pp. 218-235.

Presentation Team 2: *Listening and Feedback*

Exercise: *Listening and Feedback*

September 24

Intimacy

Read: Stewart, pp. 353-363.

Exercise: *Close conversation...*

DIVERSITY AND CULTURE

September 26

Diversity and culture

Read: Stewart, pp. 542-554.

Exercise: *Headbands*

October 1 (Celebrity birthday trivia: Whose birthday is it? What year?)

Intercultural communication

Read: Stewart, pp. 556-570.

Film: *Darmok*

Due: Essay #2

October 3

Language, gesture, and communication

Debrief: *Darmok*

Read: Stewart, pp. 146-169.

Exercise: *Babel*

October 8

Gender and communication: A dialogue

Read: Stewart, pp. 366-381.

Presentation Team 3: *Gendered communication/friendships*

Exercise: *Open dialogue*

October 10

EXAM 1

October 15

Fall Break: No Class!

DIALOGUE, RULES, AND COMPETENCE

October 17

Dialogue 1: Theoretical grounding

Theory 4: Dialogue

Presentation Team 4: *Dialogue on the Narrow Ridge*

Read: Stewart, pp. 591-630.

Exercise: *Engaging Dialogue*

October 22

Communicative Competence, Facework, and the Rules of Conversation

Read: Stewart, pp. 261-267 + Handout (Goffman).

Theory 5: Face work

Presentation Team 5: *Face work/face management*

Exercise: *Competence? Rules?*

FAMILIES, FRIENDSHIPS, AND LOVE

October 24

Family communication: An oxymoron?

Read: Stewart, pp. 288-300.

Exercise: *Family sociogram*

October 29

Friends and Lovers

Read: Stewart, pp. 327-338.

Film clip: *When Harry Met Sally*
Exercise: *My friends*
Due: **Essay #3**

THE (SOMETIMES STRANGE) DYNAMICS OF RELATING

October 31

The nature of conflict

Read: Stewart, pp. 474-501.

Exercise: *Conflict metaphors and pictures*

November 5

Conflict transformation

Read: Stewart, pp. 533-539.

Exercise: *Conflict mapping*

November 7

Relational dialectics

Read: *Relational Dialectics: An overview* (see "course documents" on blackboard)

Theory 6: Relational Dialectics

Presentation Team 6: *Thinking Dialectically about relationships*

Exercise: *Relational Dialectics Survey*

TRUST AND THE "DARK SIDE" OF RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

November 12

Trust

Read: Stewart, pp. 439-450.

Exercise: *The Informer*

November 14

No Class: Partnership Evaluation Day!

November 19

The "dark side" of Relational Communication

Read: Stewart, pp. 404-424+ *Family secrets, family stories* (see "course documents" on blackboard)

Film clips: Tough Guise + TBA

Exercise: *Open dialogue*

LEADERSHIP, SPIRIT, POWER AND ETHICS, IN RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

November 21

No Class: Writing day!

November 26

Spirit in Relation

Read: Stewart, pp. 657-677.

Exercise: *Servant Leadership*

Due: Essay #4

November 28

Power and Confirmation

Read: Allen*, *Power Matters* (e-Reserve) + Stewart, pp. 452-463.

Exercise: *Power Orientation*

December 3

Relational Ethics

Read: Stewart, pp. 341-350 + 680-695.

Exercise: *Ethical codes/credos for friends?*

December 5 Open Dialogue

December 10 Final gathering/celebration/review/last day of class: Talking about our relationships...

December 17 Final exam period (12:00 pm-3:00 pm): Exam 2

*— Note: This author will be visiting the UNCG campus in the spring semester of 2008, as part of UNCG's Harriet Elliott lecture series, sponsored this year by the Department of Communication Studies (see: http://www.uncg.edu/aas/Lecture_Series/Current_Lecture_Series.html)

