



“It is only when one recognizes the other in his very otherness, as a human being other than himself, and when on this basis he effects a penetration to the other, that he can break the circle of his solitude in a specific, transforming encounter.”

—Gabriel Marcel



**CST 663: Seminar in Interpersonal (Relational) Communication**

**Spring 2005**

**3 credit hours**

**Thursday 6:00-8:50 p.m.**



**Course Prerequisites:** Graduate Standing

**Instructor:**

Dr. Chris Poulos

Office: Ferguson Building # 110

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

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**Course Purpose/Catalog Description:** This course will engage students in the ongoing scholarly dialogue about relational communication at an advanced (graduate) level. We will approach the nexus of theory, research, and praxis in relational communication from a thematic perspective. The purpose of the course will be to come to understand relational communication from a variety of research and philosophical perspectives, and to engage in fruitful conversation about the contours of human interpersonal communicating. Through dialogue, presentations, and projects, students will work toward a richer understanding of the complex field of relational communication.

**Detailed Course Description:** Our primary purpose in this course will be to mount a critical study of scholarly understandings of relational communication, including assessment of: a) the urgent issues foregrounded by philosophers of relational communication and by researchers in the field; b) the importance and status of relational communication studies within the broader field of communication studies; and c) the prominent theoretical, research, and practical orientations of work in the field.

The seminar will be organized around a series of themes in relational communication:

1. The study of relating
2. Drama and ritual
3. Culture
4. Friendship
5. Love, distress, and the dark side of relating
6. The social construction of (relational) reality
7. Dialogue and dialectics

In our quest to comprehend these important themes, we will discuss related ideas and concepts such as: the social construction of reality; the social construction of selfhood; power; communication and meaning; the development of friendship, love, and intimacy; storytelling and dialogue; relational dialectics; gender and communication; the ethical dimensions of relationships; relational development; types and levels of relationships; conflict; intercultural communication and diversity; friendships across sexual orientation differences; the connections between personal relationships and community building; self-and-other engagement; identity, authenticity, and recognition; and new visions of relational communication.

**Communication Department Mission:** *We believe that human communication is the creative process that builds, sustains, and transforms relationships and communities. We engage students in this process through communication scholarship.*

In this course, we will adhere to the principles embodied in this mission, with a particular focus on the study and development of interpersonal relationships, and the communities in which those relationships are engaged.

**Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:**

*Students will:*

- Demonstrate a richer understanding of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks used by scholars to assess relational communication;
- Demonstrate a grasp of the importance of relational communication in everyday life;
- Demonstrate, in conversation and in writing, an understanding of the connections between relational communication and identity;
- Discuss the relationships between communication and cultures, especially the ways in which communication serves to shape cultures, and, in turn, the ways in which cultures shape communication;
- Speak and write intelligently about relational communication, with a special focus on the connections between communication and:
  - the coordinated management of meaning;
  - the construction and development of the Self and Other;
  - the understanding of the Other;
  - the development, depth, and quality of various kinds of relationships;
  - friendship;
  - intimacy;
  - family;
  - emotion and relation;
  - the dark side of relating;
  - conflict;
  - persuasion;
  - deceit;
  - power;
  - violence;

- dialogue;
  - ethical relating;
  - storytelling;
  - culture; and
  - the social construction of gender/gendered communication patterns and communities.
- Demonstrate new levels of scholarly literacy by writing and speaking coherently about relational communication research, theory, and praxis;
  - Employ, in conversation and in writing, an extensive vocabulary of terms connected with the study of relational communication;
  - Demonstrate competence at using the resources of the library and the World Wide Web; and
  - Intelligently and coherently discuss the ethical-moral dimensions of human social interaction and relationship construction.

**Teaching Strategies:** Our primary task in this seminar will be to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding various issues and themes in the field of relational communication.

As a learning community devoted to serious study of relational communication, we will focus conscious attention on four primary factors that will shape and direct our attention, our learning, and our thinking: Culture, Context, Text, and Dialogue.

### Culture

By consciously focusing on shaping (crafting) our culture as a learning community, we will be drawing upon some of the most powerful resources of our field, particularly the recognition that culture has a profound effect on communicative praxis. So: I will ask you to consciously, reflexively, and critically contribute to the co-authoring of a shared classroom culture. We will begin this process the first night we meet, by raising the following questions:

- What shared symbols, meanings, premises, and rules will be our guiding lights in our quest to craft a meaningful, vibrant, engaged, and engaging seminar culture?
- How might we, in this course of study we share—in this space called "seminar"—consciously and actively develop a learning culture that honors inquiry and seeks shared vision/commonality while embracing alterity (difference)?
- How might we individually and collectively describe and emulate our "ideal" notion of a classroom/seminar participant?
- How can we develop a seminar culture which sees and recognizes points of view as expressions of unique experience and knowledge (multivocality) rather than as threats to our own ways of understanding, and which sets the conditions for the possibility of our mutual focus on important matters related to our subject(s) of study?
- How will we, individually and collectively, aim toward these ideals?
- How will we go about monitoring/tracking our progress toward our ideals?

During our first session, then, we will reflect upon and develop a sense of clarity about the kind of culture we wish collectively to create. We will talk reflexively, thoughtfully, consciously, and conscientiously about the sorts of symbols, meanings, premises, dreams, insights, desires, orientations, actions, and rules that will guide us in our joint quest. To that end, we will draft a living document that outlines these parameters in some detail.

An important feature of a strong learning community is reflexivity. Reflexive learning praxis foregrounds the community's self-monitoring. As we go along, we must come to grips with the idea that, fundamentally, what dialogue offers is not a set of grand, sweeping, foundational, universal, and final statements of what is true, but rather, a series of contingent claims about what may be true, here and now, in the context of this conversation. *This* dialogue arises out of *this* situated locale. Dialogue is contingent upon both the reflexive experience of the speaker-learner and the social conditions within which the dialogue arises. As such, we are entering into the contested space of human communicative praxis. So we should be continuously engaged in a process of reflexive, critical self-monitoring.

### Context

By focusing on context, I mean that we must become reflexive about the historical stream of thought and action into which the work we are examining fits. We must also come to understand the historical, critical, and interpretive frames through which we might begin to examine the work represented by the text, and out of which our conversation arises. And so, practically speaking, we will work together to frame our textual, thematic, and topical dialogue within a matrix of ongoing utterances. During weeks 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13 (see schedule for dates), teams of two or three students will bring to our seminar session a set of historical-contextual frames for us to consider with respect to the theme and text we will be discussing during that course unit.

This assignment, which is described in detail in the "Assignments" section of this document, will require each student team to research: a) the work of the primary author explored in the unit; b) the scholarly stream of thought that the author's work responds to; and c) some of the various responses and extensions of the work that our field has produced. So, for example, as we read Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, the student team might well contribute: a) biographical information about Buber's life or his relationships; b) something about his conversations with other scholars (I'm thinking here of his famous dialogue with Carl Rogers); c) something about how Buber's work on dialogue and the "interhuman" fits in with other work in the field, including work that preceded it and work that flowed from or responded to it; d) some examples of current scholarship that responds to the work of Buber; and e) practical applications of Buber's work.

The point here is to take the work of any author as part of a broader context. We do this by bringing that context to light and by examining the work through the lens of our newly discovered shared contextual knowledge. For it is clear that we fall into our own genuine conversation as part of an ongoing stream of previously engaged and infinitely continuing speaking and listening praxis. The conversation is entered in a particular space at a

particular moment, and we must acknowledge aloud, as part of our conversation, how we, as a community of learners, fit into this stream. And we must be aware, as a learning community, of how we are actively shaping the context of our own learning as we go along. By attending to context, by consciously and deliberately shaping it, we change our world.

### Text

In this seminar, we will focus deeply on the text. In other words, we will be examining important and original contributions to our knowledge, exploring them in depth, inquiring as to what they offer us, seeking to challenge them and to have them challenge our ingrained ways of thinking, being, and communicating. So we will read carefully, closely, together, text in hand, always inquiring: "What does the author mean?" And, further: "What does the text mean to us here and now?" This latter question points to the living vibrancy of the author as a contributor to our conversation—a contributor with the power to instantiate change. By carrying the text actively into our lives in this way, we will, in turn, change our world. The text will be our guiding light in that regard. Practically, this means that, for each session, we will begin our discussion of the text by bringing questions to the table. Our dialogue begins by each participant bringing a question or questions raised by reading to the group for consideration. We will proceed by examining and collectively prioritizing these questions, and then begin to see if we can explore them via contact with the text and with each other. In this way, we will truly engage the text dialogically.

### Dialogue

To engage in genuine dialogue regarding important matters is really the core of human social life. In this seminar, we will consciously and actively develop our dialogic praxis. We will attend to matters of dialogic process by engaging actively in *invitation* (encouragement of participants to actively join the conversation), *generative listening* (listening that both attends actively to the meaning beneath the words and contributes to the generation of mutual risk and understanding), suspending of pre-judgments and assumptions, and treating difference and disagreement as opportunity.

Further, it seems that genuine dialogue is grounded in and reflective of human experience, and reflects the "sense" we have of being-in-the-world. When we read a good text, and when we engage in conversation about that text, it resonates with our own experience; there is a feeling of verisimilitude. The sense is that the material we are engaging and the tenor of our dialogue "fits" our experience. It feels right. It resonates. Genuine dialogue reflects the multiple realities of our "being-in-the-world." It allows for the possibility of multiple addressees (interlocutors) with a multiplicity of responses.

**Assignments:**

**1. Question journals (12):** For each seminar session (except for weeks 1, 15, and 16), you will write a question, drawn from your reading for the week, which is intended to spark dialogue about something you see as important, confusing, intriguing, vague, ambiguous, or otherwise worthy of further collective consideration. Then, in a short paragraph or two (**NO MORE THAN ONE PAGE**), you will reflect upon and respond to the question you've posed. Offer your thoughts, insights, conjectures, and even further questions as a tentative response to your question (in much the same way you might do so in class). These question journals should be typewritten, and will be turned in at the end of the designated seminar sessions. **Note: On the night your team is scheduled to offer a context presentation, you are exempt from the question journal assignment. Thus, you will turn in twelve of these during the semester...**

**2. Essays (4):** You will also write **four** essays that offer a more structured response and critique of an idea, concept, theme, or issue connected to our exploration of relational communication and to our reading for the unit during which the essay is due. Note that there are five due dates; you are responsible for four (i.e., you may skip one of the due dates; choose carefully/strategically). Each essay should highlight a topic of special interest to you, and should focus special attention on the relevance of the topic to your own communicative life. Each essay should be typewritten and should follow APA or MLA style guidelines. Page requirement: 3-6 pages. Organize your essay into three sections:

- **Participation/observation:** An important part of becoming a true scholar of relational communication will be to hone your skills as an active and reflexive participant-observer of relational communication. Section one of your essay (1-2 pages) should consist of your introduction to the topic or theme, grounded in your observations of everyday relational-communicative life. Here you should describe what you see, hear, feel, etc. as you encounter others in your daily communicative world. Offer specific and concrete observations and examples as you draw your reader into your world.
- **Interpretation:** In this section (1-2 pages), offer your clear, concise, and compelling assessment of the connections between the reading you are doing for this course and your observations of/participation in everyday life praxis. How is the text relevant to our lives as communicators? What special insights does the author offer? Here is where you might explore a relevant or significant passage or section of the text. Do not be afraid to quote, to extend, to critique!
- **Reflection:** Finally, you should spend some time reflecting on your chosen topic, and offer your reflective response to the issues at hand (1-2 pages). You should consider questions like:
  - What does this idea/concept/theme/issue mean to you in your own life?
  - How does it apply to your relationships with your significant others? How about with those who are "mere acquaintances?"

- Why do you suppose scholars think that this category of praxis we are exploring (drama, dialogue, friendship, love, etc.) is an important focal point for scholarly study?
- How has your life changed as a result of exploring this theme and related issues?
- And so on.

**SEE COURSE SCHEDULE FOR DUE DATES. NOTE:** We will actively use both your question journals and your essays in class to spark our dialogue.

### **3. Annotated Bibliography/Context Presentation:**

During weeks 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13, teams of 2-3 students will be asked to set the context for our dialogue by offering some insight into the author's life and work, how the author's work fits into the field, and how other work in the thematic area fits in with or relates to the author's contribution. Your task is to become a team of experts in the thematic area, and to facilitate our conversation for the seminar session.

Your team will bring to class a co-authored annotated bibliography of key readings for us to consider. Your annotated bibliography should have 8-10 sources beyond the text under consideration. Include a full citation (MLA or APA) and a brief, one-paragraph description of the article or book assigned for that unit of the course. Ideally, this assignment will also be helpful to you in completing your final project for the seminar. During the seminar session, your team will provide a contextual presentation, including an overview of your bibliography, and will be responsible, with my help, for facilitating our seminar dialogue.

Finally, you should bring one or two important and recent journal articles (written during the last five years or so). These articles should be devoted to exploration of the featured seminar theme. A representative from each team will be responsible for making copies of the articles for each seminar participant prior to the class meeting. We will then read and discuss that article during the following week. I will model this process during week 2 by presenting contextual material on drama, ethnography, and ritual.

### **4. Final Research Project:**

Your final project for this course will take one of the following forms, **chosen by you, in consultation with me**, to maximize your learning and to advance your own research agenda. Your choices:

**a. Field research:** If you choose, you may begin to gather data for a previously proposed research project. For example, you may extend your research proposal from my CST 600 (*Engaging Graduate Scholarship*) seminar by conducting a mini-ethnography, an interview project, or some other form of data-gathering activity. At the end of the data-gathering period (the semester) you will turn in a scholarly paper, suitable for presentation at a scholarly conference or department colloquium, based upon your research.

**b. Autoethnographic essay:** Alternatively, you could write an extended autoethnographic account of a significant relationship or relationships in your life (see examples on E-RESERVES by Ellis, Pelias, Poulos).

**c. Proposal/prospectus:** Or, you may choose to develop and write a new proposal to conduct further research in an area of study in relational communication. Your proposal will necessarily include: a) a statement of the problem including a specific delineation of your research interests and questions; b) a review of the literature in the area of interest; c) an overview of your research methods/procedures (this section should include extensive outline of how you will conduct your research, including such items as survey instruments, interview guides, etc.; the composition of this section will depend upon your chosen methodology); and (most importantly) d) an extended statement of the significance of your project to the field of relational communication (i.e., your argument as to why we should consider your work important).

**d. Literature review:** Alternatively, you may choose to conduct and write an extended literature review on a topic or theme in the study of relational communication. Here you would conduct extensive library research and write a scholarly essay summarizing the literature in your chosen area of interest. Your literature review should address a research problem or question of concern to you, and should offer: a) a cogent overview of research related to the question; b) a scholarly statement regarding the significance/importance of this research for the field; and c) your reasons for extending this body of research in your own work.

**e. Alternative/creative option:** You could develop an alternative project that connects relational communication with your interests or needs. For example, you may wish to develop a training program or some other relevant application of principles, ideas, and practices drawn from one or more of our seminar's thematic foci, or you may wish to explore these foci in depth via some other creative form (e.g., writing a work of fiction, a play, poetry, music, the visual arts, etc.).

**NOTE:** Page requirements for papers (options 1-5): 18-25 pages. For option 6, we will negotiate the extent/depth and length of your project. You **MUST** schedule a meeting with me, no later than mid-semester, to discuss and approve your project. You may, if you wish, develop a team/co-authored paper/project, but you must clear this option with me prior to beginning. SEE COURSE SCHEDULE FOR DUE DATE.

Reading:

Reading for this course will be central to the conduct of class dialogue. You simply must complete the reading prior to the seminar meeting for which it is assigned.

Attendance and participation:

Notice that participation in class discussions amounts to 23% (230 points) of your grade total. Each session constitutes a critical component of the course. If you absolutely cannot attend a session as scheduled, please see or contact me immediately; if something comes up at the last minute (emergency) which keeps you from attending, please contact me as soon as possible. Graduate school is like life: you reap what you sow. Show up. Participate actively in class discussions. Work hard. Trust me on this one: Although you may feel some stress/pain/anxiety, in the long run, it will pay off. See the handout on seminar participation for further details.

**Grading**

Question journals = 120 points

Essays = 200 points

Annotated Bib./Context Presentation = 200 points

Participation = 230 points

Final Research Project = 250 points

**Total = 1000 points**

**Scale**

930-1000 points (93%+) = A

900-929 (90-92%) = A-

870-899 (87-89%) = B+

830-869 (83-86%) = B

800-829 (80-82%) = B-

770-799 (77-79%) = C+

730-769 (73-76%) = C

**Required Texts:**

Baxter, L. & Montgomery, B. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: Guilford Press.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon.

Percy, W. (1980). *The second coming*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Philipsen, G. (1992). *Speaking culturally: Explorations in social communication*. New York: SUNY Press.

Schrag, C. (1999). *The self after postmodernity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shotter, J. (1994). *Conversational realities: Constructing life through language*. London: Sage Publications.

Tillmann-Healy, L. (2001). *Between gay and straight: Understanding friendship across sexual orientation*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

**VARIOUS READINGS ON REGULAR (PAPER) AND E-RESERVES.**

## Course Schedule

### UNIT 1: THE STUDY OF RELATING

#### Week 1 (January 13):

Theme: The study of relating (theory, research, praxis)

Dialogue:

- Course overview, themes, and assignments
- How we will study relational communication, including intersections of theory, research, and praxis
- Culture, context, text, dialogue
- Our learning community: Ethics and the Ideal Class Participant
- Story

### UNIT 2: DRAMA AND RITUAL

#### Week 2 (January 20):

Theme: The drama of relating

Dialogue: Face-work, deference, demeanor, embarrassment, alienation.

Read: Goffman, pp. 1-136 (Introduction + Chapters 1-4).

Demo: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on ethnography, ritual, drama (Poulos)

Due: Question journal # 1

#### Week 3 (January 27):

Theme: Interaction ritual

Dialogue: Alienation and Action

Read: Goffman, pp. 149-239; 258-270 (Chapter 6, sections I-VIII and X).

Due: Question journal # 2

**Friday, January 28, 4:00 p.m.: Essay #1 due**

### UNIT 3: CULTURE

#### Week 4 (February 3):

Theme: Culture and ways of speaking...

Dialogue: Culture, place, and persona

Read: Philipsen, pp. 3-61 (Parts One and Two)

Due: Question journal # 3

Team 1: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on communication and culture

#### Week 5 (February 10):

Theme: Cultural variation

Dialogue: Nacirema Culture

Read: Philipsen, pp. 65-141 (Parts Three and Four)

Due: Question journal # 4

**Friday, February 11, 4:00 p.m.: Essay # 2 due**

#### **UNIT 4: FRIENDSHIP**

##### **Week 6 (February 17):**

Theme: Friendship

Dialogue: Frames of reference and orientations...

Read: Tillmann-Healy, pp. 1-104 (Chapters 1-4)

Due: Question journal # 5

Team 2: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on friendship

##### **Week 7 (February 24):**

Theme: Friendship (revisited)

Dialogue: Negotiating relationships

Read: Tillmann-Healy, pp. 105-225 (Chapters 5-7 + Epilogue + Postscript)

Due: Question journal # 6

**Friday, February 25: Essay #3 due**

#### **UNIT 5: LOVE, DISTRESS, AND THE DARK SIDE OF RELATING**

##### **Week 8 (March 3):**

Theme: The shadow knows...

Dialogue: Shadow and dream, story and darkness and...?

Read: Poulos, *The ties that bind us, the shadows that separate us: Life and death, shadow and (dream)story* (E-RESERVES) + Introduction and Chapter 3 (Sillars' contribution on (Mis)understanding) in Spitzberg & Cupach's *The Dark Side of Close Relationships* (available on regular reserve or as an e-book online).

Due: Question journal # 7

Team 3: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on the dark side and love...

**NOTE: YOU MUST SCHEDULE OUR INDIVIDUAL MEETING REGARDING YOUR FINAL PROJECT NO LATER THAN THIS WEEK!**

**{SPRING BREAK: MARCH 7-11! BREATHE! AND READ...SEE WEEK 9: YOU'LL NEED TO READ ALL OF PERCY'S *THE SECOND COMING* BY MARCH 17...}**

##### **Week 9 (March 17):**

Theme: Love and affliction, love and language...

Dialogue: Love?

Read: Percy, *The Second Coming* (all)

Due: Question journal # 8

#### **UNIT 6: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF (RELATIONAL) REALITY**

##### **Week 10 (March 24):**

Theme: Social constructionism

Dialogue: The social construction of relationships

Read: Shotter, pp. 1-64 (Introduction + Chapters 1-3)

Due: Question journal # 9

Team 4: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on the social construction of (relational) reality

**Week 11 (March 31):**

Theme: The self in social reality

Dialogue: Self, other, encounter

Read: Shotter, pp. 118-147 & pp. 178-184 (Chapters 7 & 8 + Epilogue); Schrag, pp. 1-41 (Introduction + Chapter 1)

Due: Question journal # 10

**Friday, April 1, 4:00 p.m.: Essay # 4 due**

**Week 12 (April 7):**

Theme: The self in (social) action

Dialogue: Action, community, transcendence

Read: Schrag, pp. 42-148 (Chapters 2-4)

Due: Question journal # 11

**UNIT 7: DIALOGUE AND DIALECTICS**

**Week 13 (April 14):**

Theme: Relational dialectics/thinking dialectically

Dialogue: Centrifugal/centripetal forces; dialectical ways of understanding relating...

Read: Baxter & Montgomery, pp. 3-131 (Chapters 1-5)

Due: Question journal # 12

Team 5: Annotated bibliography/context presentation on dialogue and dialectics

**Friday, April 15, 4:00 p.m.: Essay # 5 due**

**Week 14 (April 21):**

Theme: Dialogue

Dialogue: I and Thou and Ethics

Read: Buber, pp. 54-122 (Parts One and Two); Baxter & Montgomery, pp. 132-231 (Chapters 6-9)

Due: Question journal # 13

**Week 15 (April 28):**

Theme: Dialogue in praxis

Dialogue: More on Thou and Confirmation...and dialectics...

Read: Buber, pp. 123-182 (Part Three + Afterword) + Kaufmann's Prologue, pp. 9-50.

**Friday, April 29, 4:00 p.m.: Final projects due!**

**Academic Integrity** <http://studentconduct.uncg.edu/policy/academicintegrity/>

*“An academic community of integrity advances the quest for truth and knowledge by requiring intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research, activities, and service. Cultivating honesty lays the foundation for lifelong integrity, developing the courage and insight to make difficult choices and accept responsibility for actions and their consequences, even at personal cost.”*

There is more! Read and acquaint yourself with the student code of conduct and the university’s academic integrity policy. It is your responsibility to know and abide by the academic integrity policy of this university.

**Disability**

If you have a disability or special need that 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).

**Your notes:**