

Relational Communication

Comm 3322

Dr. Melodee Sovo

Monday and Wednesday 4-5:15 APC 1.118

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Office Location JO 3.540

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 9-9:50 Am and 1-2 PM. Please don't hesitate to stop by as meeting with students is one of my favorite activities. If you need a different meeting time email me and we can arrange a virtual appointment at another time. Please give me all relevant data to your availability so we can schedule as efficiently as possible.

EMAIL: Email is the best way to communicate with me. Please watch the mini skills lecture in the Start Here module in Blackboard (e-learning is the purpose, Blackboard is the platform company's name. They are the same thing). Please allow me 48 hours to respond. I keep the right to not reply to emails on weekends. I have over 150 students this semester and ADHD, sometimes I miss something. If you don't get a reply, please kindly email again.

Course description and Learning Objectives:

The human experience comprises largely of the relationships we forge with others. This course will serve as an investigation of the necessary interdependence between relationships and communication within personal relationships. My goal will be to provide you with new perspectives of developing insights into, and critiques of, the process of relational communication, as well as options for participating effectively in public and private relationships. Thus, we are aiming for the following specific objectives:

- To demonstrate knowledge of the key elements and processes of relational communication.
- To apply communication theory to real life situations.
- To extend your awareness of the impact of your own and others' communication behaviors.
- To develop your ability to analyze interpersonal interactions within personal relationships.
- To recognize the potential barriers to interpersonal communication effectiveness.

- To increase your analytical and interpersonal skills for communicating effectively in personal relationships.

Content Consideration:

In this class we will discuss communication research that covers topics including: identity, sex, sexuality, race, religion, power, abuse, infidelity, and identity. We will discuss academic research on academic merit and dominant understandings of these topics in communication studies. Please see the academic freedom section in this syllabus for further information.

Course policies:

Food: TBD

Technology: This class is discussion based and all Slides are posted for your consideration. Please limit technology use to necessity. I reserve the right to stop ALL technology use and to roast you if you are on your technology while I am teaching. No tech use while your peers are presenting.

Respect

In this class, respecting one another is essential for an effective learning environment. This classroom is a space in which students are encouraged to engage in open dialogue, and that will NOT be met with any form of disrespect. Throughout the semester, this course will cover topics that may cause some uncomfortable feelings, tension, and even disagreement; however, students are expected to have constructive, respectful conversations. There is a ZERO tolerance policy for disrespecting your peers. It is imperative that students engage with the material with curiosity, and a willingness to learn, participate, and exit their comfort zone with an open mind. Doing so will shape students into better, more empathetic communicators.

Academic Freedom:

Higher education is predicated on the exchange, vetting, and deliberation of often controversial and unsettled ideas. In this particular class, for example, we explore how communication scholars, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and historians understand issues like race, racism, and identity. I teach peer reviewed academic research and understanding on these topics from experts in their fields.

We are not here to simply express personal opinions or repeat political talking points, but rather to engage a set of ideas and research findings that have a long and complicated history and are therefore subject to ongoing debate.

Committed students and scholars can, and do, disagree on the topics we will be discussing. As an academic, I encourage you to delve deeper into the academic understandings of these issues. Contemplate the scholar's epistemological foundations

and traditions, their methods, and their conclusions from data. How are these scholars in conversation with other academics who agree and disagree with the author's assertions? Whose understandings of these topics are being included and whose are being silenced? In what ways do the scholars engage with philosophical traditions, cultures and schools of thought to create their argument and how does your understanding of these schools of thought influence your understandings of the academic discourse surrounding the topics?

In this class I teach the prominent understandings of these issues within the discipline I have a PhD in. I am open to an academic based discussion utilizing peer reviewed published academic articles on these topics and not political or pop cultural talking points of these topics.

While you may question your professors, and in fact sometimes may be encouraged to do so, professors maintain the right to determine the content of class lessons and the flow of classroom discussion. Curiosity and a healthy amount of skepticism are key components of learning, but respecting your professors as leaders of the classroom environment is also critical. Classrooms are not public forums, such as public sidewalks or greenspaces; they are spaces where discussion is curated by your professor based on relevance to the topic at hand.

As we will talk about all semester: Stay curious my friends. Where you lived experiences and worldview shape your communication and reality, you have the ability to be reflexive, curious, and flexible when dealing with uncomfortable topics.

Recording Melodee:

I do not consent to any recording of me or my lectures in this class. If you have an accommodation that includes recordings please see me.

Grading

Grading is based upon the UTD Undergraduate Catalog. Points are accumulated for a total of 1,000 points possible for the semester. Your grade will be based upon the total number of points you earn, not the percentage of points acquired. As a result, there is no "rounding up." There is no grade negotiation at the end of the semester. Monitor your grade closely throughout the semester so you stay in control of it.

I am a human who is also operating from a lens of my own world experience. If you disagree with a grade, please make an appointment to see me within ONE WEEK of receiving a grade. If you have a question about a quiz questions, please email me the question and your concern. I do not respond to grade disagreements via email, only in person. Please come with a flushed out rationale why you do not agree with my grading and I absolutely will take your thoughts into consideration.

TURNING THINGS IN-

I do not accept pages or google docs. My Dell computer does not have the software to open Pages. If you use these applications to write, save the documents as PDFs before turning them into me. Please save all assignments as your lastname and the assignment title, particularly the speech visual aid. Please do not use anything but PowerPoint for the visual aid (Canva saves as PowerPoint without issues, google slides messes up the formatting sometimes, so check formatting before submitting).

I do not accept cloud links except to BOX from UTD. Failure to give me permission to access the assignment in Box or submitting work in Pages will result in late grading and you will have to prove you completed the assignment on time with time stamps.

I will allow you to submit your I say/They say assignments as videos. These videos should be you on camera having a social media like “conversation” with the camera for around 7-10 minutes. Please follow the DRE format but do not read to the camera from a paper. Please ensure I have access to the video when you submit it.

Grading Scale

Grade	Total Points
A+	970-1000
A	930-969
A-	900-929
B+	870-899
B	830-869
B-	800-829
C+	770-799
C	730-769
C-	700-729
D+	670-699
D	630-669
D-	600-629
F	less than 599

A	Outstanding work that meets all assignment requirements, showing creativity, superior research skills, professionalism, and an exceptional understanding of assignment objectives and resource materials.
B	Work that meets all assignment requirements, showing creativity, solid research skills, professionalism, and a clear understanding of assignment objectives and resource materials.
C	All basic assignment requirements are met yet product has some limiting issues that reduce the student's success and/or indicates less knowledge of class resources or training.
D	Weak, unsatisfactory work that is missing some assignment requirements, and/or indicates little knowledge of class resources or training.
F/Failure to Post	Unacceptable work that misses most requirements; little or no effort evident in the assignment.

Extra Credit

A maximum of **10 extra credit points** can be earned during the course. Unless something come up during the semester, this is the only extra credit I offer for this class.

Visit with me during office hours (in person or virtually) in a 15 minute get-acquainted session

(10 extra credit points). **This option is available through Week 14 only.**

To make a COMM Lab appointment, see

<https://studentsuccess.utdallas.edu/programs/commlab/> Once there, information is provided for attending in-person and virtual appointments and “How to Download

Attendance:

You are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. If you have personal circumstances that cause you to miss class frequently, see me as soon as possible. It may be that you need to take the class another semester when your timely physical attendance is more assured. Unexcused absences allowed to accumulate without teacher involvement will not be negotiated at the end of the semester. Attendance is taken within the first 15 minutes of class. There are no allowances for arrivals after 15 minutes, unless there are unusual circumstances which should be communicated to the instructor.

There are only two exceptions for class absence.

- **Excused Absences.** Absences are excused for observance of religious holidays if communicated in advance and accommodations are made. If documentation is provided, absences are also excused for personal illness requiring a physician’s assistance or hospitalization, emergencies related to a student’s family (hospitalization or death), special curriculum requirements (field trip, etc.), official university activities, or military duty. Documentation for an excused absence is due upon your return to class, or before the missed class if the absence is anticipated. The excused absence policy for family deaths can be found here: [Student Bereavement Policy](#)
- **Bonus Absences.** You have two unexcused absences without penalty. Presentations can not be made up unless you have an excused absence. Use these absences when you have uncertain health, are studying for another class, slept in, arrive at campus late, have a doctor’s appointment that cannot be rescheduled, etc. Your first two unexcused absences are counted as bonus absences. Subsequent unexcused absences result in a deduction of 10 points each.

Bad Weather clause:

In Texas we tend to see our worst weather in February. If UTD cancels classes, please check Blackboard for directions on how we will pivot the syllabus for the week.

Work/Late work

You have two “oh shoot” days to use on any assignment except presentations. You do not need my permission to use them, and they give you up to TWO extra days to

complete the assignment. Submit your work late to the original assignment link AND the “Oh shoot” assignment link in Blackboard.

Plagiarism Policy

All work that you submit must be original work for this semester, this class, and this section of Relational communication Comm 3322. You may not submit work from other classes or other semesters (called “self-plagiarism”).

You are required to document any source of information (book, article, video, music, website, photograph, lecture, slide deck, etc.) with APA 7th edition format or MLA. Using words that someone else has created, researched, and/or reported is called “plagiarism.” Using information or words from several sources and stringing them together is called “patchwork plagiarism.” Accidentally leaving citations or quotation marks out of your document is labeled as “unintentional plagiarism.” No form of plagiarism is acceptable at UTD. UTD holds you accountable whether or not you intended to plagiarize in an assignment.

All written work, drafts, final documents, and peer reviews – will be generated by students themselves, working individually or in groups as directed by assignment instructions. You may not use writing services, another’s work, or AI writers (e.g. ChatGPT). Original work is proven with outlines, drafts, proposals, and accurate citations throughout the writing process as well as a consistent tone in the student’s writing. By submitting original work, students are best able to meet the class objectives of critical thinking and personal responsibility and are in a better position to acquire the creative, analytical skills needed for distinctive professional careers.

Use of AI to generate outlines is not allowed for these reasons:

Research Sources in Question: AI generated Works Cited must be fact-checked for credibility and authenticity – some recommended sources do not exist or may not have the variety of supporting materials required for successful speech outlines. Searching for your own research sources is the first step in getting acquainted with the information for your topic. When you outsource this responsibility, you can miss the “big picture” that a personal search provides. Also, AI is known to be biased, and one-sided arguments severely decrease the credibility of your finished document.

Conforming to Assignment Requirements: AI generated outlines often do not meet the precise specifications expected in successful outlines.

Authentic Wording: AI compiles an outline based upon a wide range of sources and does not incorporate your personal thoughts and words as you speak to a particular audience on a specific occasion. The best outlines are ones that display your natural voice. It’s difficult to learn and present information that you have not personally researched and that is not written in your own speaking style.

Ethical Concerns: AI combines ideas and words from many authors and sources. It is not ethical to present these ideas as your own. Even if you cite the prompts you used in interacting with AI, a similar prompt is not guaranteed to produce the same information.

If you rely on AI to create and write your outline and then present it as your own, you are committing plagiarism. (Engleberg, Daly, & Ward, 2025).

You can find more detailed information in the UTD Student Code of Conduct.

Engleberg, I. N., Daly, J. A., & Ward, S. M. (2025). Chapter 1.4 Ethics and Free Speech. In *The Norton Field Guide to Speaking* (2nd ed., pp. 50–55). W. W. Norton & Company.

Presentation day Policies:

NO food or technology

Phones must be on Do Not Disturb – if your phone goes off during a presentation you will be deducted 10 points from YOUR speech grade. If my phone goes off you gain 10 points (this has happened twice).

Do not enter or exit the room during speeches unless there is a real emergency. Doing so will cost you 10 points on your grade.

WEEK (Mon-Sun format)	TOPIC	Monday	Wednesday
Week 1) 1/19-1/25	INTRO	NO -CLASS	Syllabus
Week 2) 1/26-2/1	Theories	HPR. Ch. 2	IR- Ch. 1 and HPR Ch. 5 Assign: TV mini assignment
	Defining relational communication		
Week 3) 2/2-2/8	Identity	Identity as constituted PDF	Secure love chapters 1 and part of 2
	Attachment	Assign- I say/They say identity Assign: Nonviolent communication book	
Week 4) 2/9-2/15	Attachment	Secure love chapters 2 and 3	G1-Family PDF G2-Couples stress sensemaking PDF Due: I say/They say Identity
	Narrative sensemaking		

			Due: Weekly reading report 1
Week 5) 2/16-2/22	Boundaries	NO reading	Research reports on Nonviolent comm
	Nonviolent communication		
Week 6) 2/23-3/1	CPM	G1- College G2-Adoption Due: weekly reading report 2	Exploring relational cultures PDF
	Relationship culture		
Week 7) 3/2-3/8	Love styles/Languages	No reading	Backburner relationships PDF Assign: I say/they say Relationship maintenance
	Relationship maintenance		
Week 8) 3/9-3/15	Social support	HPR-Ch. 25	CIC-Ch. 10 Turning points and leaving the LDS church PDF Assign: relational check-in 1
	Turning Points		
Week 9) 3/16-3/22	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Week 10) 3/23-3/29	RDT/Discourse	RDT 2.0 and family communication PDF	Readings on Blackboard Due: weekly reading report 3 Assign: I say/They say tiktok advice
	CMC		
Week 11) 3/30-4/5	Attraction	Flirting PDF	HPR chapter 30 Due: relational check in 1
	Love		
Week 12) 4/6-4/12	Emotions	NO reading Assign: pick 2 of the 4 case studies for sex	Secure love chapter 11 Sex case studies discussion
	Sex		
Week 12) 4/13-4/19	Sex	Coming-out PDF	CIC-Ch. 11 Assign: relational check in 2
	Friends		
Week 13) 4/20-4/26	Family	Communication during emerging adulthood	Due: I say/They say LOVE OR SEX
	Workday		
Week 14) 4/27-5/3	TikTok Presentations	G1	G2
	TikTok Presentations		

Week 15) 5/4-5/10	Conflict	NO reading Assign: I say/They say forgiveness	Forgive and forget PDF Due: relational check in 2
	Forgiveness		
Week 16) 5/11-5/17	You pick		Due: I say/They say Forgiveness Due: mini assignment
	Wrap up		

Assignment	POINTS
I say/They say-Identity	100
I say/They say- Relational maintenance	100
I say/ They say- Love OR I say/They say Sex	100
I say/ They say- TikTok advice paper and presentation	100
I say/ They say- Forgiveness or I say/They say -Conflict	100
Weekly reading report (50 points each 3x)	150
Relational check-in (50 points each 2x)	100
Nonviolent comm chapter presentation and info graphic	100
TV mini assignment	50
Participation	100