

Utah State University  
Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies  
**COMST 3140-001: Communication in Family Contexts**

Fall, 2015  
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday  
2:30 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.  
Location: Old Main 203

**Instructor: Dr. Kristina M. Scharp**

Office location: MAIN 069B

Office hours: Mondays and Fridays 11:30-1:00 and by appointment

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### **Course Description & Goals**

This course is designed as an advanced course on family communication and relationships—our parents, siblings, romantic partnerships, and relations with other individuals who we consider family. The basic premise of the course is that one is positioned to maximize communicative effectiveness in these relationships with **knowledge** about how communication functions combined with **application** of communication practices and experiences. Specifically, we will be working with a non-profit organization that serves disenfranchised families in the Logan area.

The majority of our meetings will emphasize the knowledge component, but each week we will also engage in a service learning activity where we will discuss our own family relationships and work towards serving families in the Cache Valley. The textbook and research articles are knowledge-centered and the service-learning component as well as class discussions will be application-centered. The course assignments (written, oral, and practice) will emphasize both the knowledge component and the application component.

Specific goals of the course include:

- Gaining factual knowledge (key terminology in family communication)
- Learning fundamental principles and family communication theories
- Learning to apply course materials to your everyday life (to help make relationship decisions, solve relationship problems, and serve members of the community)

### **Required Text**

The following required text can be purchased in the University Bookstore:

Segrin, C., & Flora, J. (2011). *Family communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: Routledge  
(ISBN: 13:978-0-415-87634-6)

**The most important thing I can stress is that I am here to help you. I want you to succeed, be engaged with the course material, and look forward to coming to class. Please let me know how I can make this happen!**

## Course Evaluation

Typically, I do not change grades unless there is a mathematical error. If you have a concern, please be sure to contact me within seven days of receiving your grade but no sooner than 24 hours. My reasoning is that applying subjective standards after the fact invalidates the standards applied to the entire class and is unfair to every student.

Points will be distributed as follows:

- **Questions and Reflections: 250 points**
- **Book Application Essay: 100 points**
- **Recipe Presentation: 50 points**
- **Book Presentation: 50 points**
- **Service Learning: 50 points**
  - **Total: 500 points**

## Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-36	D-	62-60
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	<60

**Attendance:** If you cannot be in class, I will assume it is for an important reason.

**Daily Questions and Reflections:** I expect you to arrive at **every** class (when we have an assigned reading) with at least **two** articulated issues/questions you would like to discuss during that class period—something that you found stimulating, interesting, provocative, irritating, etc. You will receive up-to five points based on the quality of your questions and your engagement in class discussion.

At the beginning of class, I would like you to write at least one of the questions/points of discussion on the board to help guide class discussion. (If you are absent, then it will be impossible for you to participate and add your question - thus you will not receive points for this component – but you still can turn in your reflection into my mailbox before class to receive up-to half credit)

In addition, I would also like you to write a reflection about how the material you've read connects with something in your own life. Tell me a story, share a memory, or send me a link. I'd be really excited if you could connect the course concepts to the service component of this course. The point is for you to show me that you: (1) read the material, (2) can apply the material in a useful way, and (3) can explicitly articulate how the two relate. In other words, don't just say that concept X made you think of time Y or song Z. In order to receive the total 5 points, you must provide me with details.

These reflections (with the questions) should be one-to-two pages single-spaced. I will collect these questions/reflections at the end of class and return them promptly. This way you can have a general sense of your grade at all times.

**Book Application Essay:** For this assignment you will read a popular book that features some family relationship(s) and discuss how the course concepts are evident in this text. You are required to include at least three major concepts and use scholarly research (not including your text book) to analyze the text. You will discuss how the author depicts the concepts, whether the depiction coincides with scholarly research, and discuss the role of communication in the family relationships/concepts you select. (see more details on Canvas)

**Recipe Presentation:** Within the context of your chosen group, I would like you share a personal story and family recipe with the class. Excellent presentations will integrate course concepts and make explicit connections between what we've learned in class to their own personal experience. The recipe should be written out (we will post them) and the dish should be brought into class for everyone to share. (see more details on Canvas)

**Book Essay Presentation:** Students should be prepared to give an oral presentation on your book application essay. You should include a very short summary of the book, the concepts you wrote about, and your analysis of those concepts. (see more details on Canvas)

**Service Learning:** *is a method of teaching and learning in which students, faculty and community partners work together to enhance student learning by applying academic knowledge in a community-based setting. Student work addresses the needs of the community, as identified through collaboration with community partners, while meeting instructional objectives through faculty-structured service work and critical reflection meant to prepare students to be civically responsible members of the community. At its best, service learning enhances and deepens students' understanding of an academic discipline by facilitating the integration of theory and practice, while providing them with experience that develops life skills and engages them in critical reflection about individual, institutional, and social ethics.*

Over the course of the semester we are going to be working with the Cache Community Food Pantry. At some point in the semester, I would like you to volunteer at the Food Pantry (contact Matt at 435-753-7140 to arrange a time). In addition, we will also be organizing a food drive to help feed families in the area. This experience provides students with the opportunity to interact with families in the community and gain new perspectives on family life (because learning not only happens inside classroom but also outside of it.) You must participate in both activities, monitor your time/donations collected, and be prepared to reflect on the experience at the end of the semester – connecting experience and concepts.

**\*All questions should be turned in as a hard copy (emailed assignments will not be accepted) and the final book essay should be submitted via Canvas.**

### Course Policies

- **Assignment Due Dates:** Late work will NOT be accepted. Any work that is not turned in on time will result in a zero for that assignment. In certain instances that are unavoidable, students may request an alternative due date. This must be negotiated BEFORE the assignment is due.

- **Grade Management:** I will provide grades as quickly as possible but it is your responsibility to keep track of your grades. No grades will be shared via e-mail.
- **Extra Credit:** It is possible (but not guaranteed) that an opportunity for extra credit might arise. This opportunity will be research-related. In the event you do not qualify for the study, another opportunity will be made available.
- **Academic Misconduct:** Plagiarism is not tolerated in any course. Students are required to complete their own work and give credit (both in writing and orally) to any source used in completing an assignment. All citations should be APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition style. Instances of academic misconduct will be reported to the University and I will determine appropriate sanctions.
- **Computer/Technology:** Technology can be a great asset to learning but research suggests that students who don't use laptops consistently outperform their peers. Thus, semester I am asking that you keep your laptops/iPads/other technology at home (or tucked away in your bags). Please take a minute to read this article for more explanation: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/30/this-year-im-resolving-to-ban-laptops-from-my-classroom/>  
Or this one: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/25/why-a-leading-professor-of-new-media-just-banned-technology-use-in-class/>  
\*Special exceptions can be made (please contact me if you have a particular need to use a computer/certain technology)
- **Students with Disabilities:** Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him/her from fully demonstrating his/her abilities should personally contact me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be made. Students are responsible for contacting Disability Resource Center and filing all necessary paperwork so that the disability can be properly documented.

### Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change if the demands of the course require it. Readings will be discussed the day they are listed. All assignments are due at the beginning of class (but discussion questions and reflections may be turned in at the end of class).

<b>Week</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Discussion Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Due</b>
1	M - 08-31	Introduction and Service Learning		
1	W - 09-02	Scholarly Conceptions of Family	pp. 3-15	
1	F - 09-04	Lay Conceptions of Family	Article 1	
2	M - 09-07	Labor Day Break		
2	W - 09-09	Discourse Dependence	Article 2	
2	F - 09-11	Interaction Patterns: Stories & Rituals	Chapter 3	
3	M - 09-14	Systems and Social Learning	pp. 25-30 & pp. 33-37	
3	W - 09-16	Service Learning: Instructions		
3	F - 09-18	Family Rituals: In the Family Now		Group I
4	M - 09-21	Symbolic Interaction and Attachment	pp. 30-33 & 37-41	
4	W - 09-23	Homesickness	Article 3	
4	F - 09-25	Family Rituals: Comfort Food		Group II
5	M - 09-28	Relational Dialectics Theory	pp. 41-44	
5	W - 09-30	Comm Privacy Management Theory	Article 4	
5	F - 10-02	Family Rituals: "Secret" Recipes		Group III
6	M - 10-05	Courtship and Mate Selection	Chapter 5	
6	W - 10-07	Talk of Love	Article 5	
6	F - 10-09	Family Rituals: Date Night		Group IV
7	M - 10-12	Marriage and Intimate Partnerships	pp. 116-126	
7	W - 10-14	Marriage and Intimate Partnerships	pp. 126-141	
7	F - 10-16	Service-Learning Day		
8	M - 10-19	Parent-Child Communication	Chapter 7	
8	W - 10-21	Adoptive Families	Article 6	
8	F - 10-23	Family Rituals: Future Family		Group V
9	M - 10-26	Sibling Communication	Chapter 8	
9	W - 10-28	Extended Family Relationships	Chapter 9	
9	F - 10-30	Family Rituals: Feels like Family		Group VI
10	M - 11-02	Voluntary Kin	Article 7	
10	W - 11-04	Power and Family Conflict	Chapter 4	
10	F - 11-06	Service Learning: Collection Day		
11	M - 11-09	Models of Family Stress	Chapter 10	
11	W - 11-11	(Non)Normative Family Stressors	Chapter 11	
11	F - 11-13	Service Learning: Collection Day		
12	M - 11-16	Divorce	Chapter 12	
12	W - 11-18	Abuse & Family Estrangement	Article 8	
12	F - 11-20	Service Learning: Collection Day	Kristina at NCA	
13	M - 11-23	Remarriage and Stepfamilies	Chapter 13	
13	WF - 25-27	Thanksgiving Break		
14	M - 11-30	Interaction and Mental Health	Chapter 14	
14	W - 12-02	Improving Family Communication		
14	F - 12-04	Service Learning: In-Class Reflection		
15	M-F- 07-11	Presentations		Book Essay