Communication in Family Contexts (CMST 4140)
TR 9:00–10:15
Old Main 301

Professor: Dr. Timothy Curran
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Office hours: 12:00–1:30 Thursdays

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Office: Old Main 303
Office hour: 12–1 Thursdays

Course overview:
This course is designed to enhance your knowledge of, and ability to critically analyze, communication within families. We will discuss a variety of family theories, family relationships, and how family communication impacts mental and physical health. The material covered in this course is based on family communication theory and empirical data. The course assignments are designed to help you apply scholarly knowledge on family communication in your own lives, as well as increase your understanding of broader family patterns in our society.

Required texts:
*Addition readings and materials posted on Canvas*

Course Objectives
This course provides an in-depth examination of family communication from an academic and theory rich perspective.
1. Students will learn about major theories in family communication research.
2. Students will examine dimensions of various family relationships.
3. Students will examine the role of family communication on health outcomes.
4. With group members, students will identify an important concept in family communication research and develop a group presentation and lead a discussion.
5. Students will enhance their writing skills with reflection papers that demonstrate their knowledge of course material.

Syllabus Statement
The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary, and will be announced to the class. Any changes or deviations from the syllabus is at the discretion of the instructor and will be announced to the class.
Principle Course Assignments
The course schedule is approximate and may change at the discretion of the professor. Change will either be announced in class or posted on Canvas; thus, I advise regular class attendance and daily check-ins on Canvas to ensure you do not miss any announcement. Exam dates will not change. Topics considered on any given day may change if we fall behind or are ahead of schedule.
Below are the percentage values for each assignment in this class.

Course Assignments and Point Breakdowns:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Presentation/Discussion Lead</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Questions &amp; Reading Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Reflection Paper 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Reflection Paper 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Grading
Please keep a record of all grades received. Use the formula below to assess your work and grade in the course. Please keep all graded papers until you receive your final grade in the course. Grades are rounded to the nearest tenth. For example, an 89.89 is rounded to an 89.9 – making that a B+ in the course.

A = 93%-100%  B+ = 88-89%  C+ = 78-79%  D+ = 68-69%  F = 0-59%
B = 83-87%    C = 73-77%    D = 63-69%
A- = 90-92%   B- = 80-82%   C- = 70-72%   D- = 60-62%

- **Final Grades.** Your final grade is final. Adjustments will be made only in the case of a mathematical error. Applying subjective standards after the fact to bolster your grade is unfair to your classmates and therefore will not occur.

Assignment Details:

Exams
Exams are a combination of true/false, multiple choice, and short answer questions.

Make – Up Exams
After the first person to finish the exam has left, I will not allow any latecomers to take the exam. Make-ups are rarely given, and never for personal reasons. Make-ups are only allowed for the following:

1. Absence due to a university sanctioned activity where students have given the instructor a week’s notice.
2. Absence due to an emergency which has been documented through their advisor or Student Affairs.
3. Absence due to an illness which has been verified in writing from your private physician. The note does not need details of the illness, but that the physician does
not think you are well enough to attend class on the date of the exam. **An indication that you had an appointment at the health care center is not sufficient.**

**Group Presentation/Discussion Lead:**
On Thursdays, groups of 3 students will give a 10 – 12 minute presentation and will bring 4–5 thoughtful discussion questions for the class to consider. Presentations will be based on the week’s reading. Essentially, you will pretend as if you authored the article(s) and book chapter(s). Your presentation should highlight the major results and themes from the reading. Explain the theories used (if any), explain the hypotheses posed and the rationale behind them, explain if the results were supported or not, and explain the significance/implications of the research. Why does this research matter? Who is affected by it and how? These are the things your group should be thinking about when organizing your presentations.

After the group presentation, we will break up into 3 groups. Each group member will lead a small group discussion with the 4-5 discussion questions your group wrote for the presentation. Discussion questions posed by the presenters will begin the discussions. However, you should ask the people in the group to pose their questions as well. Everyone will have read the readings so this is not a time to lecture the group. Instead, you should be engaging thoughtful talks about the readings together. Grades will be earned based on your efforts to engage the group, your oral presentation skills, the presentation’s substance, and organization.

**Reflection Paper 1:**
Reflection paper 1 is due a week after your group presentation. **This paper is individual work – not to be done with your group.** In this 4 – 6 page paper, you will take the 1 article from your presentation and one additional article you find on the library database and synthesize them into main take away points/important common themes. **The one additional article is unique to your paper.** That means, you should not consult with your group mates on the one additional article. Your one additional article must be a peer-reviewed academic journal article. If you need help with this, speak with Tim or Bobbi.

You DO NOT want to simply review the articles separately. Instead, we want you to read each resource and come up with main take away points that are informed by each reading. You should have 2-4 main ideas that organize the body of the paper. A question to ask yourself when reading is “What is the most important information for researchers and for the general public?” This section is the bulk of the paper and should take up 3-4 pages.

Next, you should write a paragraph on what you think is missing that you think would further illuminate this area of research. Specific ideas are always better than general ones. You do not have to bring up every gap in family research. Instead, think about one idea that you think would be useful to know more about when it comes to this topic.

Reflection paper 1 should end with you answering: How does this information help you better understand a relationship you have? – or, How it will inform your life moving forward? Being specific here is crucial. You want to SHOW how you can merge the scholarly information into your life.
Reflection Paper 2:
Reflection paper 2 is due the week before finals. You DO NOT have to write Reflection Paper 1 before writing Reflection Paper 2. In fact, if your group is not presenting until the second half of the semester, we recommend you write this paper in the first half of the semester. Reflection paper 2 is designed for you to write about any topic on the syllabus that you find most interesting. In this 5 – 6 page paper you will find 3 – 4 scholarly articles and write a paper synthesizing the main ideas/take away points. The first page of the assignment should be an introduction where you explain why you chose this topic AND why you chose these specific articles. The remaining 4 – 5 pages should be devoted to reviewing the research from the articles, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the findings, and synthesizing the main take away points. The paper should end with a paragraph devoted to recommendations for future research. As explained above, specific ideas are always more valuable than general suggestions.

Reading Quizzes:
Reading quizzes will occur on Thursdays at the very beginning of class. They are pop quizzes that are based solely on the readings for the week. You cannot make up a reading quiz in the case of an unexcused absence. If you are late and miss the quiz you can write your name on the quiz and earn 25%. You can use one page of handwritten notes only.

Weekly Discussion Questions:
Reading thoroughly in this class is crucial to your success and learning. On the weeks you are NOT presenting, you will write one discussion question based on the week’s reading(s). The question will be due to canvas by 11:59 pm on Wednesday.

Discussion questions are not easy to write. You need to demonstrate that you’ve read and (at least partly) understood the reading. You should focus on offering substantive questions about the theory, application, future directions, extensions, gaps, etc. In other words, your questions should stimulate critical discussion. Questions that do not reveal enough thought will not receive full/any credit. Considerations for developing your discussion questions:

- What questions remain unanswered/unclear?
- What issues need to be developed?
- What constructs are ignored?
- What are new/insightful observations/implications for theory and research? What is the next step?
- With what assumptions and arguments do you disagree (based on existing research/what you’ve learned)? Are there broader theoretical issues?
- How do the readings fit with other work in the area?
- Are there themes that cut across the readings?
24/7 Rule
Students that wish to discuss grades on any assignment must wait 24 hours before raising the issue. After 24 hours, you have 7 days to discuss the issue before it will no longer be considered for a grade appeal.

Attendance policy
Absences
Attendance will be taken at every class. Illness, personal or family emergencies, or university-sponsored activities constitute excused absences. However, in order to count as such, students must provide appropriate documentation to me in a timely manner (meaning one week ahead of time for university sponsored activities and the class meeting after you return from an illness).

In the case of illness, you must get a note from either your private physician or from the Student Health Center signed by a doctor or physician’s assistant that says something to the effect: “In my opinion, this student should not be in classes today and/or tomorrow (specify the particular date[s] involved).” Typically, a private physician or clinician will write a note for an illness for one or two days. However, if your illness lingers, you will need to recheck with the private physician or clinician and request an additional note to document your absence. The note does not have to indicate the specifics of your illness, but that the physician or clinician does not think you are well enough to attend class. An indication that you had an appointment at the health center is NOT SUFFICIENT.

You have two unexcused absences before penalty on your final grade. Unexcused absences are there so when “life happens” (e.g., feel sick, car won’t start) you can miss without penalty. These aren’t vacation days. You cannot make up any work for non-excused absences. For every absence after two, ½ a percent of your overall grade in the class is deducted at the end of the semester.

24/7 Rule
Students that wish to discuss grades on any assignment must wait 24 hours before raising the issue to your instructor. After 24 hours, you have 7 days to discuss the issue before it will no longer be considered for a grade appeal. For example, if you receive an exam grade on a Monday, you must wait a day until Tuesday and you have until the following Tuesday to contact me to discuss the grade. After 7 days the assignment will no longer be eligible for an appeal. Appointments may be scheduled via email, however discussions regarding grades will only be done in face-to-face interactions. You are expected to come to the discussion with concrete comments and/or concerns.

Respect and Etiquette
In-class: In this class we will discuss sensitive topics. Our goal is to have an open a comfortable classroom environment. Comments that are disrespectful will not be tolerated. Here are some things to remember:

- When another student is speaking, listen respectfully, without interrupting.
• Do not explain things to a peer unless a question is asked of you directly. Even if you are trying to be helpful, this can come across as condescending when you are not in a position of authority.
• If you take umbrage with an argument or point being made, feel free to express your concerns if you can do so professionally and respectfully. When/if you do so, focus on critiquing the idea (not individuals), and avoid using inflammatory language.
• When speaking, do so in a way that invites others to engage the topic. Put otherwise, keep your opinions dialectical, or open to response – perhaps by taking note of your tone or using I-language.
• Ask questions when you do not understand something, and don’t assume you know what others are thinking or what motivates them (everyone has different fields of experience).
• Do not expect individuals to speak on behalf of their (perhaps perceived) gender, race, culture, class status, or sexuality. It is unfair to expect someone to be a “spokesperson.”
• Commit to learning, not debating.

Email: Professional communication is essential when constructing emails in this class and others. Please begin emails with by addressing us by name “Tim,” or “Bobbi,” have a clear body with proper grammar, and end with your name. This is a good model for all emails you send to instructors

Cellphone/Computer Use: Computers can be used for notes only. No cell phones in class.

Late work:
Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of the class period that they are due or else they will receive 10% off the final grade each day the assignment is late including with the due date. An assignment will not be accepted after three days past the due date.

Academic honesty & the University Honor Code
Plagiarized work will receive an F for the assignment and may, depending on the severity of the infringement, receive a failing grade for the course and/or expulsion from the university. Refer to the university honesty/honor code for further policies pertinent to this class.

Additional Information:
If you have a disability, I strongly encourage you to contact the Disability Resource Center and myself so that the classroom environment can be made conducive to your learning style.

All materials from this course including the syllabus, course notes, quizzes, activities, papers, exams, etc., are copyrighted as intellectual property (unless otherwise noted as credited) and are not to be duplicated, reproduced or posted to any website without express authorization.

“Responsible Employee” Status
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Major Assignment Info</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
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<td>Aug. 29</td>
<td>Defining Families</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Family Theories</strong></td>
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<td>Sept. 3</td>
<td>Family Systems Lecture</td>
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<td>Sept 5</td>
<td>Family Systems Discussion</td>
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<td>Sept 10</td>
<td>Attachment in Families Lecture</td>
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<td>Sept. 12</td>
<td>Attachment in Families Discussion</td>
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<td>Sept. 17</td>
<td>Family Schema Lecture</td>
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<td>Family Schema Discussion</td>
<td>Discussion lead 2</td>
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<td><strong>Family Subsystems</strong></td>
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<td>Sept. 24</td>
<td>Courtship Lecture</td>
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<td>Sept. 26</td>
<td>Courtship Discussion</td>
<td>Discussion lead 3</td>
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<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td>Marital Conflict and Divorce Lecture</td>
<td>Bobbi instructs this week</td>
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<td>Oct. 3</td>
<td>Marital Conflict and Divorce Discussion</td>
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<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Sibling Communication Lecture</td>
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<td>Oct. 10</td>
<td>Sibling Communication Discussion</td>
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<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td><strong>Writing workshop/Lecture</strong></td>
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<td>Oct. 17</td>
<td><strong>Midterm</strong></td>
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<td>Oct. 22</td>
<td>Parenting Styles Lecture</td>
<td>Bobbi instructs this week</td>
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<td>Oct. 24</td>
<td>Parenting Styles Discussion</td>
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<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>Parent-Child Conflict Lecture</td>
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<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>Parent-Child Conflict Discussion</td>
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<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Family and Positivity/Thriving Lecture</td>
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<td>Family and Positivity/Thriving Discussion</td>
<td>Discussion lead 6</td>
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<td>Nov. 12</td>
<td>Family and Mental Health Lecture</td>
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<td>Nov. 14</td>
<td>Family and Mental Health Discussion</td>
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<td>Discussion lead 7</td>
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<td><strong>Families and Structural Inequality</strong></td>
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<td>Nov. 19</td>
<td>Family and Race/SES Lecture</td>
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<td>Nov. 21</td>
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<td>Discussion lead 8</td>
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<td>Nov. 28</td>
<td>Open office hours</td>
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<td>Nov. 30</td>
<td>Thanksgiving break</td>
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<td>Dec. 5</td>
<td>Family and Gender/Sexuality Lecture</td>
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<td>Family and Gender/Sexuality Discussion</td>
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<td>Discussion lead 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Final exam</strong></td>
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<td>Thursday Dec 12 at 9:30 am</td>
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**Readings:**

**Week 1: What is a Family?**
Segrin & Flora (2011) pages: 3 – 15

**Week 2: Families as Systems**

**Week 3: Attachment in Families**
Demidenko et al. (2015)
Curran et al. (2019)

**Week 4: Family Communication Environments and Schema**
Segrin and Flora (2011) pages: 50 – 52  
Koerner and Schrodt (2014) pages: 1 – 9  
Hesse et al., (2017)

**Week 5: Courtship and Marriage**
Mannino &. Deutsch (2007)

**Week 6: Marital Conflict and Divorce**
Hawkins (2012)

**Week 7: Communication between Siblings**
Segrin and Flora (2011) pages: 166 – 182  
Mikkelsen (2011)

**Week 8: Midterm**
Week 9: Parenting Styles
Segrin and Flora (2011): 142 – 161

Week 10: Parent-Child Conflict Communication
Segrin & Flora (2011): 329 – 331
Sillars et al. (2011)

Week 11: Family Communication and Mental Health
Arroyo, & Andersen, (2016)

Week 12: Family Communication and Thriving/Well-Being
Preston et al. (2016)

Week 13: Family Communication and Race/SES
Minniear & Soliz (2019)

Week 14: Family Communication and Gender/Sexuality
Riina & Feinberg (2012)
Lannutti (2018)