

Communication in Family Contexts (CMST 4140)  
MWF 9:30 – 10:20  
Eccles Jones EDU 130A

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Office hours: Monday 12:45 – 1:45 or by appointment

**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:**

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

\*Additional 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.

**General Expectations and Policies:**

*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.**

### **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. 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.

### **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.

### **Honesty:**

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.

Students may not use a paper written in another class for credit in this one, or vice versa, without instructor consent.

Refer to the university honesty/honor code for further policies pertinent to this class.

### **Respect and Etiquette**

**In-class:** This class is designed to give students a safe space to explore and engage with new and challenging ideas. Thus, this class we will cover sensitive topics such as family violence, eating disorders, divorce etc. Comments that are disrespectful will not be tolerated and students may be asked to leave class. Speaking over other's in class is also unacceptable. Any inappropriate behavior in class will adversely affect your participation grade.

**Email:** Professional communication is essential when constructing emails in this class and others. Please begin emails with by addressing me by "Tim," have a clear body with proper grammar, and end with your name. This is a good model for all emails you send to instructors. You are responsible for making sure I receive all emails; therefore, I recommend sending yourself a carbon copy of all emails you send.

**Cellphone Use:** Please refrain from checking your phones during class time. It is a distraction to you and those around you.

**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 professor and will be announced to the class.

**Course Assignments and Point Breakdowns:**

<b>Midterm</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Group Presentation/Discussion Lead</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Reading Quizzes</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Concept Reflection Paper 1</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Concept Reflection Paper 2</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Discussion Questions/Participation</b>	<b>5%</b>

**Group Presentation/Discussion Lead:**

During the semester, groups of 2-3 students will give a 10 – 12 minute presentation and will bring 6 – 8 thoughtful discussion questions for the class to consider. Presentations will be based on the week's topic (e.g., sibling communication, mental health), but your presentation will examine a *specific area of the topic that you find important and interesting*. For example, if you are scheduled to present the week we discuss sibling communication, you may choose to give your presentation on sibling communication in late adulthood, or how siblings manage their relationships when one goes to college for the first time. I will provide some examples of each topic just to give you an idea/starting point. If you are having a hard time choosing, talk to me. You must okay your topic with me at least one week in advance. Aim to choose something that is interesting to you, will likely be interesting to the audience, and will

feasibly fit within the time constraints of the assignment. You must use at least 3 scholarly sources (articles and/or books) to give your presentation sufficient conceptual depth. These must be clearly cited in your presentation.

This assignment is grounded in scholarly research – however you can also spend time pointing out examples of your topic in the media (TV shows, movies, etc.). This can add interest to your topic and help show how families are portrayed in pop culture. This is not a required part of the assignment (some topics will align with this idea more than others). After the group presentation, we will sit down as a class and discuss the topic. Discussion questions posed by the presenters will begin and lead out discussion. Grades will be earned based on your efforts to engage the class, your oral presentation skills, the presentation's substance, and your organization. Detailed guidelines will be provided, and I will provide a general template for you on the second week of class.

### **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 5 – 7 page paper, you will take the 3 scholarly sources from your presentation and one additional article and synthesize them into main take away points/important common themes. **The one additional article is unique to your paper.** You may also use the required readings from that week to inform your paper if you wish.

You DO NOT want to simply review article by article separately. Instead, I want you to read each resource and come up with main take away points that are informed by each reading. A question to ask yourself when reading is “What is the most important information for researchers and for lay people?” This section is the bulk of the paper and should take up 4-5 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, I 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 Wednesdays OR Fridays. They are pop quizzes that are based solely on the readings for the week. Quizzes will occur in the beginning of class. 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.

### Course Schedule:

Day	Topic	Major Assignment Info
Jan 8	Course Introduction	
Jan 10	Defining Families	
Jan 12	Family Systems Theory	
	<b><u>Family Theories</u></b>	
Jan 15	No class	
Jan 17	Family Systems Theory	
Jan 19	Family Systems Discussion	Discussion lead 1
Jan 22	Attachment in Families Lecture	
Jan 26	Attachment in Families Lecture	
Jan 26	Attachment in Families Discussion	Discussion lead 2
Jan 29	Family Schema Lecture	
Jan 31	Family Schema Lecture	
Feb 2	Family Schema Discussion	Discussion lead 3
	<b><u>Family Subsystems</u></b>	
Feb 5	Courtship Lecture	
Feb 7	Courtship Lecture	
Feb 9	Courtship Discussion	Discussion lead 4
Feb 12	Marital Conflict and Divorce Lecture	
Feb 14	Marital Conflict and Divorce Lecture	
Feb 16	Marital Conflict and Divorce Discussion	Discussion lead 5
Feb 20	Sibling Communication Lecture	
Feb 21	Sibling Communication Lecture	Tuesday – but class
Feb 23	Sibling Communication Discussion	Discussion lead 6

Feb 26	<b>No class</b>	
Feb 28	<b>Reflection paper 2 Workshop</b>	
Mar 2	<b>Exam 1</b>	
Mar 5	No class	
Mar 7	No class	
Mar 9	No class	
Mar 12	Parenting Styles Lecture	
Mar 14	Parenting Styles Lecture	
Mar 16	Parenting Styles Discussion	Discussion lead 7
Mar 19	Parent-Child Conflict Lecture	
Mar 21	Parent-Child Conflict Lecture	
Mar 23	Parent-Child Conflict Discussion	Discussion lead 8
Mar 26	Family and Mental Health Lecture	
Mar 28	Family and Mental Lecture	
Mar 30	Family and Mental Discussion	Discussion lead 9
April 2	Family and Positivity/Thriving Lecture	
April 4	Family and Positivity/Thriving Lecture	
April 6	Family and Positivity/Thriving Discussion	Discussion lead 10
	<b><u>Families and Structural Inequality</u></b>	
April 9	Family and Race/SES Lecture	
April 11	Family and Race/SES Lecture	
April 13	Family and Race/SES Discussion	Discussion lead 11
April 16	Family and Gender/Sexuality Lecture	
April 18	Family and Gender/Sexuality Discussion	
April 20	Family and Gender/Sexuality Discussion	Discussion lead 12
April 23	Improving family communication	
April 25	Improving family communication	
April 27	Review/Writing workshop	Reflection paper 2 Due
<b>Monday, April 30</b>	<b>Exam 2 at final exam at 9:30</b>	

**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.

### **Required Readings:**

#### **Week 1: What is a Family?**

Segrin & Flora (2011) pages: 3 – 15

#### **Week 2: Families as Systems**

Segrin and Flora (2011): 25 – 30

Cox (1997) pages: 246 - 256

#### **Week 3: Attachment in Families**

Segrin & Flora (2011) pages: 25, 37 – 40

Demidenko et al. (2015)

#### **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**

Segrin and Flora (2011) pages: 91 – 106, 112 – 114, 135 – 141

#### **Week 6: Marital Conflict and Divorce**

Segrin and Flora (2011) pages: 126 – 130, 247 - 264

#### **Week 7: Communication between Siblings**

Segrin and Flora (2011) pages: 166 - 182

#### **Week 8: Midterm**

#### **Week 9: Parenting Styles**

Segrin and Flora (2011): 142 – 161

#### **Week 10: Parent-Child Conflict Communication**

Sillars et al. (2011)

Segrin & Flora (2011): 329 – 331

**Week 11: Family Communication and Body Image/Depression**

Segrin and Flora (2011): 295 – 300, 307 – 312

Curran, Samp, & Janovec (2017): 278 – 292

**Week 12: Family Communication and Thriving/Well-Being**

Curran & Andersen (2017) 33 – 35

Preston et al. (2016)

**Week 13: Family Communication and Race/SES**

Jeon and Nepl (2016): 22 – 32

Constantine. (2006): 697 – 709

**Week 14: Family Communication and Gender/Sexuality**

Riina & Feinberg (2012): 836 – 850

Floyd (2001): 39 – 47