



COMM Communication Theory & Everyday Life
Spring 2025
Online, Asynchronous

Instructor: Dr. Natasha Seegert
Email: n.seegert@utah.edu (Email is the best way to reach me—please use it!)
Office Hours: Email me to set up a meeting, I love meeting with students!
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COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

This course, which serves as an introduction to the academic discipline of communication, is designed to furnish you with a basic understanding of the major theoretical perspectives that inform contemporary communication studies. Specifically, this course will assist you in developing a more thoughtful, sophisticated, and critical understanding of communication processes; allow you to apply that knowledge in the interpretation of a variety of communication situations, issues, and problems; and exercise and improve your analytical skills through brief written analyses as well as through active application of theories.

Course Goals

- To explore basic issues and perspectives in the study of communication
- To develop proficiency in the critical analysis of a variety of communicative forms and practices
- To understand the scope of communication as a field of study

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students should demonstrate their abilities to think critically using written academic argument, analysis, critique, and evaluation.
- Students should be able to analyze and interpret texts and case studies by applying the concepts, questions, and theoretical paradigms discussed in class and in the assigned readings.
- Students should be able to formulate illuminating and persuasive claims in their writing, projects, and exam responses. These ideas should reflect a solid internalization of the course material.
- Students should be able to use textual evidence (via quotation, analysis, and documentation of pertinent passages) to ground their arguments and back up their claims.
- Students should be able to express their ideas in clear, logical, organized, concise, and persuasive ways, in both written and oral forms.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The assignments for this course are not excessive, but you will need to devote a great deal of time to the course **EVERY DAY**. To keep from falling behind, plan to **read, write, and/or view films every day**.

Books

Griffin, E. (2023). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (11th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw- Hill.

This book is available through Inclusive Access which you can opt out of: <https://portal.verba.io/utah/login>

Films

Most of these films will be available to view streaming for free through the Marriott Library's Streaming Services. In some instances, you will need to rent it for a small fee via a streaming service like Amazon.

Currently Assigned Films (additional films may be added)

- “Nosedive” from *Black Mirror*, Season 3, Episode 1, directed by Joe Wright (available through Netflix; TV-MA)
- *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, directed by Marielle Heller (PG)
- *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve (PG-13)
- *Twelve Angry Men*, directed by William Friedkin (1997 version; PG-13)
- *Experimenter*, directed by Michael Almereyda (PG-13)
- “Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos” from *Frontline*, Season 38, Episode 2 (unrated)
- *The Mask You Live In*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (unrated)
- *Killing Us Softly 4*, directed by Jean Kilbourne (unrated)
- *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (Rated-R)

ONLINE COURSE FORMAT

- All coursework will be **online and asynchronous**.
- All times are for **Mountain Standard Time**.
- This course will function off a **Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule** for the posting of all lectures, assignments, and assignment submissions.
- **Typed lectures will be posted one week in advance** each Monday by 12:00 PM (noon).
 - Lectures will supplement the textbook content and will serve to nuance some concepts, expand on others, and demonstrate the application of the theory to media. Students must read and demonstrate knowledge of textbook and lecture content.
- **Assignments will be due on Wednesdays and Fridays by 2:00 PM, MST**. A 9-hour & 59-minute grace period will be provided until 11:59 PM. No extensions will be offered beyond that grace period. Students will not be penalized who submit within that grace period. **Do not request an exception to the deadline**. To assist students who encounter unexpected problems, I build into the course the ability to drop your lowest scores for weekly assignments.
- **Advanced feedback on assignments** can be provided 48 hours prior to the assignment deadline, excluding weekends and holidays.
- **Assignments will be graded within two weeks** of the submission deadline.
- **Have a question?** Email your professor at the email address listed at the top of the syllabus. I may take up to 48 hours to respond to your email (excluding holidays and weekends). In your email, do the following: include an informative subject line, include a salutation that includes my name and title (e.g. Dear Professor Seegert), include your own name at the end of the email, and proofread your email.

A Note on Deadlines: The 2:00 pm deadline was established so that a grace period is built in until 11:59 pm. No extensions will be offered beyond 11:59 pm. Based on years of experience, the 2:00 pm deadline encourages students to post by 2:00 pm and then provides students with time to respond to their classmates' posts. There is no time that works perfectly for all students, so if you don't like the 2:00 pm deadline, then plan to submit early! Assignments are always posted well in advance.

In need of a laptop or hot spot? The [Marriott Library can rent you one!](#) In addition, students can always access computers at the Marriott Library, or even at a public library. Having a bad computer or Internet connection is not an excuse for missing deadlines.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Syllabus & Lecture 1 Quiz (2 points).** The syllabus and Lecture 1 quiz must be completed with a perfect score to progress in the course. You will be given multiple chances to take the syllabus quiz.
- **Introductory Post (3 points).** The Introductory Post must be completed to progress in the course.
- **Quizzes (15 points).** Each week you will complete a short, online quiz that addresses materials discussed in previous class lectures. Quizzes will be matching, multiple choice, and fill in the blank. Quizzes CANNOT be made up. *12 possible quizzes, 1.5 points each, the lowest two scores will be dropped.*
- **Theory Discussion Posts (25 points).** Once a week on odd numbered weeks (i.e. Week, 3, Week 5, etc.), you will be required to post a critical response – 250-400 words – to an online discussion forum engaging with specific questions I ask about the assigned materials. You will also be required to respond – 50-125 words – to the postings of two other students. You will not be able to see your peers’ postings prior to your own posting. *6 responses possible, 5 points each, the lowest one score will be dropped.*
- **Theory Reflections (25 points).** Once a week on even numbered weeks (i.e. Week 2, Week 4, Week 6, etc.) you will submit a reflection –350-500 words – regarding the application of a theory to your own life. Submissions must be made using MS Word. *6 responses possible, 5 points each, the lowest one score will be dropped.*
- **Mid-Term Exam (20 points).** The mid-term exam will be fill-in-the blank, matching, and multiple choice on terms, concepts, and texts/case studies/films read or discussed in class during the first half of the semester. *Mid-term will be timed on Canvas and available to take for three days. Once started, the exam must be completed.*
- **Final Exam (35 points).** The final exam will be fill-in-the blank, matching, and multiple choice on terms, concepts, and texts/case studies/films read or discussed in class during the entirety of the semester. *Final exam will be timed on Canvas and available to take for three days. Once started, the exam must be completed.*
- **Course Reflection (5 points).** A final course reflection – 350-600 words – will require you to consider what you have learned throughout the course of the semester and apply it to your everyday life.

Course Assignment Values – 130 points possible

Syllabus Quiz:	2 points
Introductory Post:	3 points
Quizzes:	15 points
Theory Discussions:	25 points
Theory Reflections:	25 points
Mid-Term Exam:	20 points
Final Exam:	35 points
Course Reflection:	5 points

Letter Grade Values (Do not ask me to “round-up” your grade. I won’t.)

94-100 A	87-89.9 B+	77-79.9 C+	67-69.9 D+	00-59.9 E
90-93.9 A-	84-86.9 B	74-76.9 C	64-66.9 D	
	80-83.9 B-	70-73.9 C-	60-63.9 D-	

COURSE POLICIES

- **Course Agreements.** In order to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas, the following principles will guide interactions among students and professors in this class:
 - Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their claims and arguments;
 - Treat every argument as open to examination, even if it comes from someone with more experience or expertise than you;
 - Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, claims, opinions, and conclusions;
 - Some arguments, perspectives, opinions, and conclusions are unreasonable or based on falsehoods and should be identified as such;
 - No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
 - You will not be graded on whether your professor or peers agree with you;
 - You will be graded on the evidence and reasoning that leads to your arguments and claims.
- **Course Netiquette.** Communication allows us to engage with others and broaden our perspectives. How we talk about concepts together, in the physical or virtual classroom, is part of that process. Here is the basic netiquette that will be expected in the course:
 - Always address your classmates by name. There is a human being on the other side of the screen who also has struggles, doubts, and bad days.
 - Disagreement is encouraged! Approach differences in a manner that seeks clarity and better understanding by asking productive questions and by providing counterarguments that are supported with evidence and not simply with feelings.
 - Anytime you have a strong emotional reaction to something, pause before responding. Emotions can be deceptive and can be regretted if acted on too hastily. Instead, always seek to provide an argument that is supported by credible evidence based on the theories we discuss in this course.
- **Due Dates & Submission Procedures.** Assignments are due as indicated on Canvas. Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx) is required for submitting papers electronically. Please adhere to style and citation formats outlined on assignment sheets – failure to do so will result in a loss of points. **No late work will be evaluated.** To accommodate students encountering unexpected hardships, the lowest scores of weekly assignments will be automatically dropped at the end of the semester. Please refer to the assignment categories for more details.
- **Email.** Please email me at the email address listed at the top of the syllabus. Be aware that I may take up to 48 hours to respond to your email (excluding holidays and weekends). In your email, do the following: include an informative subject line, include a salutation that includes my name and title (e.g. Dear Professor Seegert), include your own name at the end of the email, and proofread your email.
- **Curriculum Accommodations.**
 - I am able to make **schedule accommodations** for those who have a conflict that involves religious/spiritual observances, or University sanctioned activities (see University Policy 6-100 (III), section O). If you anticipate any scheduling conflicts with this course, please email me as soon as possible. It is the student's responsibility to contact me and it must be done through email.
 - I do not make **content accommodations** for course required materials (see University Policy 6-100 (III), section Q). Students may encounter reading materials, presentations, lectures, or audio/visual materials controversial or in conflict with their values or beliefs. Please be assured that all course content has been selected for its pedagogical value and utility in relation to the concepts we are engaging. **I will NOT make content accommodations** for this material. It is your responsibility to review the syllabus, readings, assignments, and materials in advance to be sure that this is a course you wish to take. Should you have questions, contact me immediately.
- **CDA Accommodations.** If you have an accommodation through the Center of Disability and Access, you **MUST** inform your professor about the accommodation – via email – during the first week of the semester.

- **Extra Credit.** I rarely offer extra credit. However, if you attend carefully to the typed lectures, you will discover some “Easter Egg” extra credit opportunities. Luck favors the prepared mind!

Note on Potentially Offensive Course Material (!)

Scholarly engagement with cultural texts (which might include R-rated films, mature video clips, irreverent cultural critiques, etc.) often involves encountering material from outside an individual’s philosophical, religious, political, or personal comfort zones. **Please be advised that this course may contain such material.** Such material may include—but is not limited to—obscenity, profanity, representations of sexuality, violence, religion, anti-religion, politics, encounters with controversial issues in the media, etc. Students who feel that this may be a matter of concern should consult with the instructor *immediately after the first class session*. It is your responsibility to research required texts for potentially offensive materials.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

- **Academic Misconduct**

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one’s work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah’s Student Code: [Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct](#).

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code: *“...Includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one’s work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information...It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.”*

For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

- **Accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

The *Americans with Disabilities Act* requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. Email the instructor of this course at the very beginning of the semester to discuss any such accommodations for this course. The Center for Disability and Access must provide the course accommodation. See the following link for more information: <http://disability.utah.edu/>

I can only provide accommodations that are requested by the Center for Disability and Access (CDA). Students with a CDA accommodation must adhere to the stipulations listed in the official letter from CDA.

- **Safety at the U**

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more safety information and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, contact: [Campus Police & Department of Public Safety](#)

- **Addressing Sexual Misconduct**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status, or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to university officials:

[Title IX Coordinator & Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#)

[Office of the Dean of Students](#)

[Campus Police & Department of Public Safety](#)

[Center for Campus Wellness](#)

A Final Note for Students

Successful students typically demonstrate a high degree of intellectual curiosity and critical interest, as well as an ability to respond to feedback. Please consider the online classroom as a community space in which we all share a scholarly adventure. I hope you already have, or will develop, a sense of responsibility to and respect for other students by sharing your thoughts, insights, and confusions. **Most important: I want you to do well in this course!** Please let me know how I can help.

Thanks! I look forward to working with you this semester!

~ Dr. Seegert – n.seegert@utah.edu
