

Intro to Interpersonal Communication & Culture

This class introduces you to the study of interpersonal communication. We will try to understand the communicative processes and practices that occur between people. Namely, whenever we communicate, we mean so much more than the literal words we say. The competency we have is due to our socialization in our culture. Therefore, how we communicate and what we mean with our words is culturally patterned. This means that people from different backgrounds can make different inferences resulting in miscommunication. Moreover, our communication links us to our society and helps us build our identity. However, this can lead to social problems like discrimination and marginalization.

Spring 2021

MW 11:15AM - 12:05PM

No Zoom class on F

Instructor: Nora Suren

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Office hours: Th 10AM-1PM

Unit 1: Introduction: What is Communication?

First, we will delve into questions about what communication is and why it is important to study it. We will look at how people define communication in their everyday lives in different cultures. In this class, we consider U.S. Americans and Native Americans. We will also consider a few theories on the significance of communication to get a better grasp of what we are studying. The goal is to determine the various dimensions of communication which are essential to understanding how we talk in everyday life.

Unit 2: Doing Things With Words

Next, we will look at what utterances are used for by speakers. First, we look at the meaning of person-references and how they are consequential to the interaction. Next, we conceptualize speech as a speech act. We will consider how these practices relate to both identity and culture. We will also think about how to infer meaning when it is not straightforwardly given.

Unit 3: Dynamics of Interaction

An essential element of communication is that it is interactive: if one talks, one commonly expects a response. This requires that there is a system that we can recognize whose turn it is to speak or what we are supposed to say. The rules for interaction differ, however, across cultures and contexts. On a macro-level, rules can create social problems. This system of rules can also be used to dominate the interaction, and thereby reproduce power differences in society.

Unit 4: Communication as Self-Expression

Communication overall enables us to present a comprehensive picture of who we are. Who we want to be is the major force in shaping our communication. We will both consider how we build social identities (like "American") as well as how we express emotions. Again, we will consider how this differs across cultures.

Course Outcomes

- You will be able to identify the various dimensions of communication.
- You will be able to use this knowledge to analyze communication:
 - You can identify different types of meaning entailed in talk.
 - You can explain why communication is successful or not.
 - You can explain how miscommunication can be resolved.
- You will be able to connect communication to social structures.
 - You will be able to show how identity is enacted through talk.
 - You will be able to show how talk recreates power relations.

Grading

1. Participation (10%) – you are expected to actively engage in class
2. Discussion Posts (10%) – respond to the prompts on Moodle
3. In-Class Quizzes (10%) – short quizzes about the readings
4. Written Exercises (35%) – exercises to practice applying theory
5. Summary (10%) – practice writing effective summaries
6. Take-Home Exam (25%) – exam centered on applying theory

The Fine(r) Print for this Class

If you ever encounter something unexpected or feel overwhelmed, let me know!
I am here to help you to succeed in this class!

grading scale

%	60	63	67	70	73	77	80	83	87	90	93	100
F	D	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	

attendance and participation

You are expected to be present (and participate) in class for all scheduled meetings. To be present and participate means that you engage in class in discussions and activities, and are not afraid to be wrong! This allows you to get the most out of the class.

I will take attendance for each class meeting. In case you have to miss a class meeting, you are strongly encouraged to contact one of your peers to access their notes. After 3 missed class meetings (excluding religious holidays and university sponsored travel), each class meeting you miss results in your final grade being lowered by one letter grade (e.g. A- → B-). Moreover, as tardiness is highly disruptive to the classroom, it will lower your final grade: every three meetings you are late, count as 1 absence. Please also note that you cannot receive a grade for any in-class assignment you miss.

names, pronouns and language

Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that they use for themselves. In order for me to use your preferred/chosen name and pronouns, if they are not listed in spire, please let me know! You will not be asked to, but you may share your preferred pronoun with the class. We will all respect these choices throughout the semester. More generally, it is important to be mindful of our language!

zoom policy

Video is optional but participation is required. However, as this class is about interpersonal communication, video is highly recommended. You can use virtual backgrounds if you do not prefer showing your environment on Zoom.

late submissions

As I have to reserve time for grading in my schedule, I cannot accept late submissions without prior approval. If you get in trouble with the assignments for whatever reason, please contact me and we will find a solution. Note that the deadlines enable you to spread the work for this class throughout the semester: keep in mind that having to do all the work in finals week would be too much!

disability and counseling services

UMass is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a physical, psychological, or learning disability

on file with the Office of Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for accommodations to help you succeed. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, notify me ASAP. We will work together to make arrangements. If you have physical/mental impediments to your ability to complete coursework, or think you might have a disability, I encourage you to consult DS at umass.edu/disability.

The Center for Counseling and Psychological Health (CCPH) helps students who experience a variety of issues and provides individual and group counseling. Visit umass.edu/counseling to learn about their services (related to stress, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, relationships, and much more).

trigger warnings

Sometimes this class will touch upon potentially tough topics, including racism, sexual harassment and discrimination. If you anticipate distress from encountering a topic and know you cannot participate and engage with these issues, talk to me ahead of time. I will do my best to arrange an alternate assignment. Importantly, as you may know, there is a difference between being *triggered* (in the sense of post-traumatic stress disorder) and feeling *uncomfortable*. Feeling uncomfortable (and sometimes even angry or offended) is part of intellectual growth. Feeling triggered or psychologically traumatized is not. Please take care of yourselves and each other, and let me know if I can do anything to help.

academic dishonesty

The academic enterprise requires honesty in your work and is prohibited at UMass, and includes (but isn't limited to) cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Sanctions may be imposed on a student who commits academic dishonesty. Unless I specify otherwise, assignments should be your sole efforts. Most students plagiarize out of panic – please come talk to me instead!

communication

To contact me outside class time, please use UMail. I will respond within 24 hours. If you need a lengthy or detailed answer from me, please visit me during office hours. Make sure to check the syllabus and Moodle before emailing me. I will also send important updates (like changes in our class schedule) to your UMass email address.

important websites

UMass disability services: <https://www.umass.edu/disability/> | Academic Honesty: <http://www.umass.edu/honesty/> | Library Databases: <https://www.library.umass.edu/research/> | Writing Center: <https://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/>

Our Reading Schedule

*** Remember that this schedule may be subjected to change ***

Unit 1 – Introduction: What is communication?

- 02/01** Read syllabus
- 02/03** Katriel & Philipsen, “What we need is Communication”, pp. 303-309.
- 02/08** Carbaugh, “Just Listen”, pp. 253-262.
- 02/10** Hall & Hall, “The Sounds of Silence”.
Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics”, pp. 18-28.
- 02/15** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 1: “Talk and Identity”, pp. 1-13.
- 02/17** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 1: “Talk and Identity”, pp. 13-30.
- 02/22** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 2: “Two Perspectives”, pp. 31-54.
- 02/24*** Wellbeing Wednesday - No class

Unit 2 – Doing things with words

- 03/01** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 3: “Person-Referencing Practices”, pp. 57-72.
- 03/03** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 3: “Person-Referencing Practices”, pp. 72-76.
Vasilyeva*, “Identity as a Resource to shape Mediation”, pp. 363-372.
- 03/08** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 4: “Speech Acts”, pp. 77-106.
- 03/10** Kitzinger & Firth, “Just Say No”, pp. 295-309.
- 03/15** Sacks, “Everyone Has to Lie”, pp. 68-74.
Bailey, “Greetings and Compliments or Street Harassment”, pp. 358-371.
- 03/17** Youssef, Grimshaw & Bird, “Greetings in the Desert”, pp. 800-808.

Unit 3 – Dynamics of Interaction

- 03/22** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 6: “Interaction Structures”, pp. 132-145
- 03/24** Henley & Kramarae, “Gender, Power & Miscommunication”, pp. 18-30; pp. 41-42.
- 03/29** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 11: “Genres”, pp. 245-263
- 03/31** Bailey, “Communicative Behavior and Conflict”, 90-99.
- 04/05** Tracy & Robles, Chapter 10: “Narratives”, pp. 216-244.
- 04/07** Miller, Cho & Bracy, “Working Class Children’s Storytelling”
Polanyi, “Telling the American Story”, pp. 64-67; 79-88.

Unit 4 – Face-Work

- 04/12** Carbaugh, “Talking American”, pp. 21-40.
- 04/14*** Wellbeing Wednesday - No class
- 04/19** Goffman, “Face-Work”.
- 04/21** Bailey, “The Language of Multiple Identities”, pp. 193-197; pp. 214-215.
- 04/26** Hochschild, “Capacity to Feel”. pp. 75-86.
- 04/28** Kotchemidova, “Emotion Culture”, pp. 207-229.
Abu-Lughod, “Bedouin Blues”, pp. 24-33.
- 05/03** Last day of class
- 05/12** FINAL EXAM