

COMX 414: COMMUNICATION IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Spring 2018

MWF 12:00-12:50

CRN: 38426

Classroom: LA 304/305

PROFESSOR: DR. STEVE YOSHIMURA

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Required Course Materials

Regan, P. (2011). *Close Relationships*. New York, NY: Routledge press.

Additional readings available on Moodle.

Course Overview

Welcome to COMX 414, Communication in Personal Relationships. The purpose of this class is to help you learn about the role communication plays in the development, sustainability, and decline of close, personal relationships. The study of communication in personal relationships involves research conducted in psychology, sociology, family studies, and human communication, and much of what we discuss will involve perspectives from all of these disciplines. However, the course has a distinct focus on how interaction between couples lends itself to the process of relating. This course also fulfills the university writing requirement for communication studies majors.

In short, completing this class will give you the ability to:

- Explain how communication plays a role in the development, maintenance, and dissolution of personal relationships.
- Be conversant with the major topical areas of research in the study of communication in personal relationship contexts.
- Independently discover, interpret, and discuss scholarly research on communication in personal relationships.
- Construct a well-written scholarly essay that summarizes and analyzes research on personal relationships.
- Apply your knowledge about theory and research on human relationships to practical problems in personal relationships.

Assignments and requirements

People in modern societies are surrounded by massive amounts of easily-accessed information about what makes relationships succeed or not. Some of this information is based in credible academic research, but a lot of information is based on other, untestable and unquestionable sources of knowledge, such as someone's personal experience, stereotypes, religious faith, astrology, or other unverifiable sources. Although knowledge from those latter sources can have their time and place, it is important to be able to distinguish those sources from empirical knowledge about communication in personal relationships. The risk of accepting nonverifiable information about relationship practices is that one can never know for sure what the best, most effective or useful course of action might be to take to solve the challenges involved in building and maintaining quality personal relationships. The major assignment for this course is designed to help you determine and communicate what the best, most competent solutions to relationship challenges might be.

Your Major Assignment*

The major assignment for this class involves analyzing published academic research for the purpose of providing a set of recommendations. These recommendations will help solve a practical problem that many people might experience in close, personal relationships.

The overall assignment will be completed in separate five parts across the entire semester:

(Part 1) A problem statement and annotated bibliography.

(Part 2) A literature review.

(Part 3) A set of research-based recommendations.

(Part 4) A revised, final submission of the literature review and recommendations.

(Part 5) A presentation of your findings at the end of the semester.

*These assignments involve writing and talking about about academic, peer-reviewed research. Your writing will most effectively be accomplished by spending time familiarizing yourself with the relevant peer-reviewed research (using PsychInfo or Communication and Mass Media Complete) BEFORE you begin writing. So please be sure to budget your time accordingly for each assignment.

Part One: Problem Statement and Annotated Bibliography (Due: Monday, 2/5 – 20 points)

Problem statement

About two (2) weeks before the due date:

- Examine the list of communication problems in relationships that I've provided on Moodle, and pick one that appeals to you, or see me about other ideas you might be interested in.
- Determine the most relevant key words for the problem or question, open PsychInfo or Communication and Mass Media Complete, type in your key words, and locate at least eight (8) published peer-reviewed research reports that are relevant to the problem or question (eight reports = minimum, basic requirements met).
- Read the articles, focusing on the literature review and the discussion sections. Highlight and/or take notes about the important points in each study.

About one (1) week before the due date:

Once you've done the above, you will then write a two-page paper that states and explains the relationship problem or question that you would like to examine in your research this semester (see the provided list on Moodle). Again, I would expect that this part will be approximately 2 pages, not including the cover page, and formatted in APA style.

In this paper, you should address the following issues:

- What the problem is (clearly state what problem or question is, and why researchers believe it is important).
- The prevalence of the problem (by the best estimates you can find in peer-reviewed research, how common is this issue or question in relationships?)

- The known consequences of the problem, as discussed by researchers (e.g., societal, relational, psychological, physical, financial, or other consequences), and
- Your personal motivation for examining this problem.

Annotated Bibliography

The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to help you become deeply familiar with the research that will be discussed in your literature review (the next assignment). The annotated bibliography will regard the 8+ published, peer-reviewed academic studies that are about the problem you have chosen to address.

In an annotated bibliography, you cite each source (in APA style) that you found relevant to your topic. For each article, provide a one-paragraph description.

Specifically, for each article, I hope to see you discuss (in one paragraph):

- what you think the study is about,
- one major finding from the study, and
- your explanation for why this study is relevant to the problem or question that you want to examine.

You will receive feedback on this assignment, but I will not ask for a revision. Instead, you will use my feedback as you begin to work on the literature review.

Part Two: Literature Review (Due: Wednesday, 2/28 – 50 points)

For this paper, you will write a review of all the academic research reports relevant to the problem. You have already gathered at least eight reports, but you might find it useful to also consider and include some additional others at this point, because your knowledge about the problem may have grown a bit. As you write, think of your audience as being primarily academic. *Begin organizing and writing this paper about two weeks before the due date so that you have time to consult with others about the writing process.*

Introduction

The introductory paragraph to this paper should summarize:

- what the problem is,
- why it is important, and
- what your proposed solution is to the problem, or what your answer is to the question. This statement you make - the answer to the question or proposed solution to the problem - serves as your thesis statement. A thesis statement represents the main claim in your argument about the problem or the question, clarifies the position you are taking to it, and helps your readers know what to expect from the rest of the paper.

Review

The next section of the Literature Review is the review itself.

- This is the largest part of the paper, and is usually about 6-8 pages long by itself.
- Organize your studies by their findings prior to actually writing. Think about all of the studies you have gathered as having been invited to a party you're throwing (i.e., your literature review). At the party, you want everyone (i.e., all your studies) to get to know each other and you don't want anyone standing alone. Your job as a host (i.e., the writer of this paper), then, is to not only explain what is important to know about each guest, but *what it is that the guests (i.e., studies) have in common with each other, especially in respect to your thesis statement.* Obviously, not every study will have something in common with every single other study, so you have different subsections of the paper. You can thus group the guests (i.e., the studies) according to areas of commonality.
- Organize your review according to 2 or 3 subpoints you want to communicate to your readers about the answer to the question or solution to the problem.
- In each subsection, write about how the findings of all of your studies are connected to one another, and how they serve as evidence to support your thesis statement (see above). Above all, you must avoid talking about individual studies as individual studies separate from one another, and instead work toward discussing how the study findings

are connected to one another in logical ways.

Obviously, the review will be easier to write if you are very familiar with all of your guests, so be sure to read all of your studies (focus on the literature reviews and conclusions of those reports) BEFORE you begin writing. Again, it helps to take notes on each study as you read.

Conclusion

- End your paper by summarizing what the research findings you reviewed above provide as an answer or solution to the problem.
- The answer will probably have a lot of conditions to it. For example, research might show that a certain type of communicative behavior has benefits, but only for some people, in some specific types of relationships, at certain times. Include a discussion about those nuances, rather than presenting an overly simplistic single “solution” to the given problem.

In total, I would expect this paper to be somewhere around 10 pages, excluding the title page and references. Give your paper a title that reflects the contents of the paper, and not the title of the assignment (avoid, for example, submitting a paper titled, “Literature Review”). Be sure that you have one-inch margins, 12-point font, and double-spaced lines. Staple it in the upper left-hand corner. You will receive feedback on this assignment and will be required to revise it for the final submission.

Part Three: Recommendations (Due: 3/19 – 40 points)

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your ability to translate empirical, peer-reviewed research findings into practical recommendations to help your audience engage in communication to solve the problem you discussed in the previous assignments.

- This paper is argumentative in nature, so you’ll be using relevant research findings as evidence to convince your readers that your recommendations would work. Some of the findings you wrote about in your literature review will be useful, but you might find it helpful to include some additional others as well.
- This paper can be written in a more informal, conversational tone than the previous papers. You can think of your audience as being your friends, family, or anyone else who you believe could benefit from your advice.
- Develop five (5) **specific and actionable** recommendations for how your readers **could or should use communication** to solve the problem or question you addressed in the previous papers. Each actual recommendation should be a subheading in your paper. Be sure to state each recommendation succinctly and clearly.
- For each recommendation, explain why your readers should believe that the recommended communication activity would actually work. **Use research findings as evidence** to logically explain why you are making the recommendation, and to support your claim that the recommendation would be appropriate and effective. In other words, be sure to explain how you know, from the research you read, that the recommendation is a “good” one.
- For each recommendation, identify and discuss any caveats, exceptions, or conditions that might exist. For example, whether or not the recommendation you are making might only work for some specific type of relationship, type of people, or under some specific conditions.

The length of this paper will vary from topic to topic, but I would imagine that the average length would be about four or five pages, excluding title page and references. I will give you feedback on this assignment and you will revise it for the final submission.

Part Four: Revised Literature Review and Recommendations (Final Submission) (Due: 4/23 – 30 points)

The final submission will be a single paper that is the product of your revisions to both the literature review and recommendations paper. After you make the revisions to the literature review and recommendations papers, combine them into one paper, provide a title page, and include a bibliography, all in APA format.

This paper will be evaluated on the comprehensiveness and quality of your revisions. **When you turn in this paper, you must also return to me your original papers with my provided feedback.**

Part 5: Presentation 4/23-5/4– 10 points)

After you submit your final revisions to me, you will give the class a presentation teaching them about your recommendations. The presentation should be 5-7 minutes long, and reflect the norms of professional public communication skills.

- Open the presentation with an introduction to the problem or question you studied. Perhaps tell a story about it or share some interesting information you know about it.
- Explain your recommendations, and argue for their effectiveness. Include empirical evidence that supports the recommendations – give your audience a reason to believe that each recommendation would work.
- Conclude with your overall main point; what it is that you want your audience to leave with. One effective strategy is to return to the introduction, finish the story, or add some additional message that you want the audience to remember.

Exams 50 points each (150 points total)

There will be three exams. The questions will be an assortment of multiple choice and short answer questions. I will provide study guides for each exam, and the final will not be cumulative.

Grades

A = 270-300; B = 240-269; C = 210-239; D = 180-209; F = 179 and below, or due to conduct code violations.

A - This work is *outstanding* relative to the basic requirements.

B - This work is *significantly better* than what was necessary to fulfill the requirements.

C - This work *meets the basic requirements* in every respect.

D - This work *deserves credit*, even though it does not meet the basic requirements.

F - This work *fails to meet the basic requirements*.

Course Policies and Related Information

1. Attendance and Participation

Attendance is expected of all students enrolled in this course. In the event that any class is missed, students are expected to contact the instructor as a matter of professional courtesy, continue to meet all deadlines, and obtain necessary materials from classmates. I recommend obtaining notes from missed classes, and then contacting me with specific questions about those notes.

Attendance is mandatory during course presentations at the end of the semester. Three points will be deducted from the total course points for each missed class.

2. Laptop Computer and Electronic Device Policy

You may bring your laptop and electronic devices to this class. In fact, there may be times at which I ask you to connect your device to the classroom technology for us to examine course-related information.

However, [numerous studies](#) show that taking notes by simply transcribing content into your lowers not only your own test scores, but also those of the people around you. The reasons are simple – people process less information when simply transcribing words and looking at what other people are doing on their devices.

Unfortunately, my experience is that students who open laptops or tablets in class ostensibly for taking notes inevitably move their attention to unrelated content on those devices. Given the research on this issue, and my personal experience, engaging unrelated content in this course (on a screen or otherwise) during class is prohibited.

3. Late Work

Assignments become late when they are turned in after the class period of their due date. The topic statement and annotated bibliography will not be accepted if it is late. Otherwise, a late assignment will receive a **10% penalty for each weekday** that it is late. The assistants in the main office do not mark times or dates on papers that are turned in to them.

Exceptions to the late penalty will not be distributed freely. If you are sick when an assignment is due and want to turn it in late, **you must provide a legitimate doctor's note** that indicates the days that you were unable to attend class. This must be turned in with your completed assignment.

A Note on Computer Problems: You are responsible for knowing how your computer works and the potential problems of using it. Save your work frequently, take care of your data storage devices, make sure that your computer is using an updated virus-protection program, and make every attempt to print your papers ahead of time. Given the computer resources on this campus, I cannot reasonably accept computer-related excuses for late work.

4. Exam policy

Exams are administered only on the days scheduled. Once an exam has been distributed, you may not leave the room until you have submitted your exam for grading. All electronic devices must be turned off during exam times. No exams will be distributed once the first person has submitted her or his exam for grading (don't be late). No exam can be missed and made-up without a valid and legitimate reason (no excuses).

Valid and legitimate reasons never involve non-refundable plane tickets, road trips, concerts, early vacations, outdoor recreation, or any other random and unverifiable absence. If you are sick when an exam is given, **you must provide a legitimate doctor's note** that indicates the days that you were unable to attend class. This must be turned in at the time you take the exam. Dr.'s notes must be originals (no photocopies, carbons, faxes, or emails). **If an absence is known ahead of time, you must make arrangements before the exam is distributed.**

On the occasion that an exam is taken at a time other than the scheduled time, the exam may be administered in essay format.

If you will miss class due to a university-sponsored activity, you are required to (a) introduce yourself prior to missing class, (b) provide a copy of your travel schedule that indicates the days you will be missing, and (c) discuss with me your plans for making up the work.

5. Written Work

Your written work is a nonverbal message about your professional abilities. To that end, all papers for this course must be typed (12-point Times New Roman font), double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Other APA style format issues apply where appropriate. **Always staple your paper in the upper left-hand corner.** It is a good idea to keep a back-up copy of all your assignments.

What counts as good writing? Every assignment has its own specific evaluation criteria, but very broadly speaking, I look for four aspects when I evaluate undergraduate student writing. First, I examine the extent to which the paper is *well-written*. To me, this means that the writer: (a) constructs sentences and paragraphs according to conventional writing rules, (b) writes in an active voice, and (c) writes with correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Second, I look to see if the paper is *fully developed*. To me, this means that: (a) the paper is well-researched, (b) the writer responds to the requirements in a way that shows comprehension of the main issues, and (c) the writer's main points are clearly observable and supported by evidence and detail. Finally, I look to see if the paper is *organized*. To me, this means that: (a) the ideas are developed in a logical fashion, and (b) the organization is purposeful and clear. Of course, the quality of content is essential. In this class you will learn to write about relationships in an academic voice, so the content of your papers should be thoughtfully based on academic thought on relational communication.

Have questions about grammar, mechanics, writing vocabulary, or anything else related to academic writing? I encourage you to visit the writing center frequently while working on your papers. **The Writing and Public Speaking Center provides a comfortable environment where students can engage in supportive conversations about their writing and receive feedback at any point during a writing process.** To make an appointment and learn more about

The Writing and Public Speaking Center's by-appointment and drop-in hours, visit www.umt.edu/writingcenter, or call 243-2266.

6. Academic Misconduct

According to the University of Montana Bulletin, "Plagiarism is the representing of another's work as one's own. It is a particularly intolerable offense in the academic community and is strictly forbidden. Students who plagiarize may fail the course and may be remanded to Academic Court for possible suspension or expulsion... Students must always be very careful to acknowledge any kind of borrowing that is included in their work. This means not only borrowed wording, but also ideas. Acknowledgement of whatever is not one's own original work is the proper and honest use of sources. Failure to acknowledge whatever is not one's own original work is plagiarism." I want to add to that it also is unacceptable to submit (a) papers written by yourself for this or other courses without prior consent from the instructors of those course, (b) papers written by someone else, or (c) to be dishonest with me, the instructor of this course, during any interaction regarding the course material or work.

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the student conduct code. Please see the Student Conduct Code for definitions and consequences of cheating and plagiarism at: www.umt.edu/SA/VPESA/index.cfm/page/1321.

7. Incompletes and course withdrawals

See the *University of Montana Catalog* for more information on the policy regarding these options. Incompletes are very rarely granted, and only under the most unique circumstances. You may withdraw from the course until the 30th day of the semester. After that, you may petition to withdraw, but only for medical reasons, family emergencies, a change in work schedule, or other uncontrollable reason. It is the policy of the university, department, and this course to not normally grant withdrawal petitions after the 30th day without documentation.

8. Auditing and Credit/No Credit options:

According to the University Catalog, the Credit/No Credit grade option exists "to encourage students to venture into courses where they might otherwise hesitate because of uncertainty regarding their aptitude or preparation..." It does not exist as protection from poor performance after the 45th day of the semester. So, if you decide to audit this class or desire the credit/no credit grade option, you must indicate this decision to me within the first 45 days of the semester. I cannot grant any grade-option changes past that time. *If you wish to apply this course to your general education requirements, you must take it for a traditional letter grade, and earn at least 70% of the course points.*

9. If you participate in University-sponsored activities (e.g., sports, debate, etc.)

I need a letter from your coach documenting your participation, as well as copy of your schedule indicating which days of class you'll need to miss due to your activity. You are responsible for getting notes and making arrangements to turn in your assignments/take exams.

10. Unique Needs

I and the University want everyone to have a fair chance at doing well in class. If you have unique needs that help you overcome some challenge to your learning, please contact Disability Services for Students (DSS) in the Lommasson Center (Room 144; 243-2243). They will help you determine what types of resources are available to help you and will provide you with a letter to me detailing those resources. Give me the letter and we will work together to make sure that you begin with a "level playing field" for your performance in this course.

11. Grades and privacy

If you need grade information, check Moodle or make an appointment with me. Email and telephone are not considered as private communication forums. Email is actually considered a public forum, and I can never guarantee that it is actually you on the other end of a telephone. Thus, I do not discuss grade information over email or telephone.

12. A note on relationship matters:

Personal relationships are complicated. While they are mostly a source of strength and flourishing, they can also be a source of pain and even trauma. If you believe someone might have persuaded or forced you to engage in undesired sexual interaction, and/or if someone has purposefully hurt you, whether physically or psychologically, please know

that there are sources on this campus to help you. The Student Advocacy Resource Center is a good place to call in these situations. They can be reached 24 hours a day at 406-243-6559.

Course Calendar*

Readings not in Pamela Regan's "Close Relationships" book can be found in the "Course Readings" section of Moodle.

* Schedule is subject to change as necessary

SECTION 1: RELATIONSHIP BEGINNINGS

Week 1

M 1/22: Course introduction

W 1/24: Introduction to relationship science

Readings:

- Regan, Chapter 1
- Hess, J. A., Fannin, A. D., & Pollom, L. H. (2007). Creating closeness: Discerning and measuring strategies for fostering closer relationships. *Personal Relationships, 14*(1), 25-44. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00140.x>

F 1/26: Writing workshop: How to find, read, and write about relationship science (bring the Hess, et al., 2007) article to class today.

Homework: Begin finding sources for the Problem Statement and Annotated Bibliography assignment.

Week 2

M 2/29: Attraction

Reading:

- Regan, Chapter 4

W 2/31: Attraction continued

F 2/2: Strategic misrepresentation in online dating

Reading:

- Hall, J. A., Park, N., Song, H., & Cody, M. J. (2010). Strategic misrepresentation in online dating: The effects of gender, self-monitoring, and personality traits. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27*(1), 117-135. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407509349633>

Week 3

M 2/5: Relationship initiation

DUE: Problem statement and annotated bibliography

Readings:

- Regan, Chapter 5
- LeFebvre, L. E. (2017). Swiping me off my feet: Explicating relationship initiation on Tinder. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517706419>*

W2/7: Relationship initiation, continued

F 2/9: Relationship initiation, continued

Week 4

M 2/12: Exam 1

Homework: Reverse-outline the literature review for the LeFebvre (2017) article from last week – bring the outline and the article to class on Wednesday.

W 2/14: Writing workshop: Writing a literature review

Homework: Begin organizing, outlining, and writing your literature review.

F 2/16: No meeting

SECTION 2: RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

Week 5

M 2/19: President's day – no school

W 2/21: Models and theories of relationship growth and development

Reading:

- Regan, Chapter 6

F 2/23: Relationship growth continued

Week 6

M 2/26: Relationship maintenance and support

Reading:

- Regan, Chapter 9
- Stafford, L., & Canary, D. J. (2006). Equity and interdependence as predictors of relational maintenance strategies. *Journal of Family Communication*, 6(4), 227-254.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327698jfc0604_1

W 2/28: Relationship maintenance and support

DUE: Literature Review

F 3/2: Writing workshop: Developing recommendations from research

Week 7

M 3/5: Love and attachment

Reading: Regan, Chapter 10

W 3/7: Communicating love

F 3/9: Sexual interaction

Reading: Regan, Chapter 11

Homework: Outline and begin writing the recommendations paper

Week 8

M 3/12: Exam 2

SECTION 3: RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

W 3/14: Conflict

Reading: Regan, Chapter 14 (pp. 247-260)

F 3/16: Conflict

Week 9

M 3/19: The process of relationship decline

DUE: Recommendations

Reading: Chapter 14 (pp. 260-270)

W 3/21: The process of relationship decline continued

F 3/23: Relationship decline continued

Reading: Chapter 15 (pp. 273-282)

Week 10

M 3/28- F 4/1 Spring Break

Week 11

M 4/2: Rejection and transgressions

Reading: Chapter 12

W 4/4: Rejection and transgressions

F 4/6: Jealousy experience and expression

Week 12

M 4/9: Relational aggression and violence

Reading: Regan, Chapter 13

W4/11: Relational aggression and violence

F4/13: Relational aggression and violence

Week 13

M 4/16: Relationship repair and recovery

Reading: Guerrero, Andersen, and Afifi (2014) – on Moodle

W 4/18: Relationship repair and recovery

Reading: Regan, Chapter 15 (pp. 282)

F 4/20: Establishing Just Relationships

Reading: Kelley (2017) – on Moodle

Weeks 14 and 15

DUE 4/23: Final Submission

M 4/23- F 5/6: Presentations

Possible topic on F 5/6: Research-based guide to good relationship practices

Final exam

Friday, May 11, 10:10-12:10