

COMX 485: Communication and Health
Fall 2018
CRN: 74614
T/TH 2-3:20
Room: LA 304

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2 and always by appointment

Social relationships are the cornerstone of a healthy life. People with whom we formally and informally relate help enhance the quality of our lives in profound ways. For one, they help us accomplish our basic goals in life by providing us with all kinds of “social support.” However, they also provide us with important opportunities to exchange love, affection, gratitude, humor and forgiveness. Research has recently suggested that these opportunities to communicate provide us with both objective and subjective health outcomes. The purpose of this course is to help you discover how human communication and interpersonal relationships intersect to affect our physical and psychological well-being. More broadly, this class is about how communication can make our lives happier, healthier, and more satisfying lives.

In this class, you will learn how to:

- Identify and distinguish the various ways in which “health” can be defined.
- Recognize and explain the main theoretical reasons why and how health relates to human interaction and relationships across the lifespan.
- Explain how specific types of communicative behaviors (disclosure, affection, gratitude expressions, etc.) relate to health and well-being outcomes.
- Interpret and synthesize research findings that help explain your own experiences of communication and well-being.

Required Readings

Weekly readings, and a weekly schedule of those readings are available on the Moodle online course supplement, in the “syllabus” section.

Vaillant, G. E. (2002). *Aging well: Surprising guideposts to a happier life from the landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co.

Assignments

This course will have two major written assignments. For the first paper, you can choose between doing either the “ask for help” assignment, OR the Communicating Gratitude assignment. Everyone must do the second paper, the “Last week in Missoula” assignment. Please see the Moodle course supplement for full descriptions of each assignment.

Graduate students must see me about an additional graduate-level assignment to fulfill the requirement for graduate-level credit in this course.

Assignment 1 Option A: “Ask for Help” assignment 25 points Due: 10/2

Assignment 1 Option B: Communicating Gratitude 25 points possible

Communication part (the letter) due 10/4, Analysis part (the paper) due 10/9

Your Last Week in Missoula Due: 11/14 50 points possible

Presentation Due: Final week of class 10 points possible

Exams - 150 points possible (50 each exam)

Course Policies

1. Attendance and Participation

Because the course involves discussion of the readings each week, attendance is essential. I will take attendance *at least* six times in this class. Being absent during two of those times (i.e., one full week’s worth of class meetings) will reduce your grade by one full letter. Missing four and six classes will reduce your grade by one and two additional letters respectively (thus, missing six classes would result in the highest possible grade being a “C.” You must let me know if you know ahead of time that you will be absent. In such an event, *your* responsibility is to find out what you missed and to get the lecture notes from one of your classmates. Once you review those notes, I encourage you to come speak with me about any questions you might have about the discussion you missed.

2. Exam policy

The exams will be taken in class, and can be taken alone or collaboratively with one other person. For each exam, I will distribute an online survey that allows you to declare whether you wish to take the exam alone or collaboratively. If you choose to take the exam collaboratively, you may choose one partner to work with. Your partner must be declared in advance, and both partners must agree to take the exam with each other. You will be allowed to choose a specific partner, or ask me to assign you a partner.

You can choose the same format for each exam, or choose different formats or different partners.

3. Late Work

If you know that you will be missing a class, you should make an effort to submit your assignments early. Assignments become late when they are turned in after the class period of their due date. Whereas no quizzes can be submitted after the due date, other 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.

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. Exams will be administered only on the days scheduled. No exam can be made up without a valid and legitimate excuse. Valid and legitimate will be decided on the basis of evidence provided. Note that valid and legitimate never involves plane tickets, vacations, outdoor recreation, or any other random and unverifiable excuses. 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 assignment is due.**

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.

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 discs, 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. Written Work

All papers must be typed, double-spaced, and in the appropriate format (APA). It is a good idea to keep a back-up copy of all your assignments.

All papers must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner.

5. Academic Misconduct

According to the University of Montana Catalog, "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 not appropriate to submit papers written by yourself for previous or other courses.

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/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321

6. Incompletes

See the *University of Montana Catalog* for more information. These are very rarely granted, and only under the most unique circumstances.

7. Credit/No Credit grade option

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 desire the credit/no credit grade option, you must indicate this decision to me within the first 45 days of the semester. I will not grant any grade-option changes past that time. *If you wish to apply this course to your major, minor, or general education requirements, you must take it for a traditional letter grade.*

8. Unique Needs

I 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 see Disability Services for Students (DSS) in the Lommasson Center (Room 144; phone: 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. We will work together to make sure that you begin with a “level playing field” for your performance in this course.

9. If you participate in University-sponsored activities (e.g., sports, debate, etc.) AND you will be missing assignment due dates or exams for related activities

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. A note about professionalism

This is a professional setting, in which your success requires attention, engagement, and respect. Civility can be enacted in many ways, but perhaps one of the more recent issues to challenge classroom civility is in the use of electronic communication devices during class time. If you have personal issues to attend to during a specific class, it is acceptable to excuse yourself from class and return when you are ready. Do not otherwise use mobile devices while in class.

11. Help on campus

Life and relationships are complicated, and college can be a challenging, even if meaningful experience. Please know that we have excellent professional resources on campus to help you manage a variety of issues that you might encounter. The College of Education has assembled [a useful list of campus resources](#) that might help.

Course Calendar

*Calendar is subject to change

All weekly readings posted on Moodle

WK 1

Topic: What is “Health” and Why is Communication Important to it?

WK 2

Topic: Key terms and concepts for understanding research on health and communication

WK 3

Topic: An overview of the health benefits of social relationships; Overview of The Harvard Study of Adult Development

WK 4

Topic: Social support, comforting, and advice-giving

WK 5

Topic: Expressing gratitude, compassion, and kindness

Note: **Exam 1 on 9/27**

WK 6

Topic: Humor

Due: Assignment 1 option A: Ask for help assignment – Tuesday, 10/2

Reminder: Gratitude night, Thursday, 10/4, 7:30pm: Specific location TBA

WK 7

Topic: Affectionate communication

Due dates/reminders: Due on 10/9: Assignment 1 option B: Communicating Gratitude – analysis paper (attach the letter too)

WK 8

Topic: Self-Disclosure

Reminder: Plan your “last week in Missoula” experience now. Include time for both experiences and research.

WK 9

Topic: The Role of Space and Design in Well-Being

Note: **Exam 2 on 10/25**

WK 10

Topic: Emotional experience and expressions

WK 11

Topic: Love and attachment

WK 12

Topic: Forgiveness

Due dates/reminders: "Last week in Missoula" paper due 11/13

WK 13

Topic: Aging well

Reminder: **No meeting 11/23 (Thanksgiving break)**

WK 14

Topic: Public Policy and Social Well-being

Reminder: Prepare your presentation for next week

WK 15

Presentations

WK 16

Presentations continued (if necessary)

Final exam: 3:20-5:20, Tuesday, December 11