COMX 485: Communication and Health
(Social Interaction and Human Well-Being)

Spring 2020
MWF 2 – 2:50
CRN: 34178
Room: LA 302

Instructor: Steve Yoshimura, Ph.D.
Office: LA 347
Office Phone: (406) 243-4951
Email: Stephen.yoshimura@umontana.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 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.

This course fulfills an elective requirement for the Interdisciplinary Gerontology Minor. Please contact me if you would like more information.

Required Readings

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

Assignments

The assignments for this class are divided into two categories: Focus assignments and an integrative assignment. The focus assignments are designed to enhance your understanding about a specific topic in the course, whereas the integrative assignment is designed to help you assemble your knowledge about communication and health into one experience. The detailed assignment instructions can be found on the Moodle course supplement.

Focus Assignments - Choose any three from the list - 75 total points possible (25 points each)

Integrative Assignment: Your Last Week in Missoula  Due:  50 points possible

Presentation  Due: Final week of class  10 points possible

Exams - 150 points possible (50 each exam)

Graduate-Level Increment (For graduate students only).

To take this course for graduate credit, students must accomplish one additional assignment. The details of the assignment can be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, but generally the assignment is to write a literature review on a topic related to one of the course topics. The literature review can take one of two forms. Either it will be a "state-of-the-art" review, in which a body of literature on one of the course topics is comprehensively reviewed with the goal of providing an up-to-date overview of the current state of knowledge about the topic, or a "literature insights" review, in which the literature in a particular class-related area is reviewed with the goal of addressing or answering an empirical question about one of the course topics. Both options should culminate with a proposed research agenda aimed at highlighting what the most useful directions of future research on the chosen topic should be.

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](http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321)

6. **Incompletes**
See the [University of Montana Catalog](http://www.umt.edu/) 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*

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
COMX 485: Communication and Health Course Readings
(all readings other than chapters in the Vaillant book are available on Moodle)

Week 1: The definition and composition of health


Week 2: Key terms and concepts for understanding research on health and communication


Week 3: An overview of the health benefits of social relationships, and issues of aging well


Vaillant, Chapters 1 and 2, and Appendix A

Week 4: Social support, comforting, and advice-giving


Week 5: Expressing gratitude, compassion, and kindness


Vaillant, Chapter 4

If you are interested in more information on this topic:

Robert Emmons’ lab (http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/PWT/index.cfm)

Week 6: Humor


Week 7: Affection


If you are interested in learning more about this topic:


Week 8: Self Disclosure


If you are interested in other information on this topic:

James Pennebaker’s webpage on writing and health
(http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/Faculty/Pennebaker/Home2000/WritingandHealth.html)

Week 9: Space and Design


Week 10: Emotional experience and expressions


Vaillant, Chapter 2, pp. 60-82.

**If you are interested in more information on this topic:**

[Barbara Fredrickson’s Online Mood Tracker](http://www.positivityratio.com/)


Week 11: Love and attachment


Week 12: Forgiveness


Vaillant Chapter 3.

Week 13: Aging well


If you are interested in more information on this topic: Laura Carstensen’s [Stanford Center on Longevity](http://longevity.stanford.edu/)

Week 14: Public policy and social well-being


Week 15: Presentations