

CMST 4310  
Family Communication  
Spring 2022

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Office Hours: T/Th 9:30-11:00 a.m., or by appointment  
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Mark's Basic Philosophy: *Life is hard, but it is even harder if your family is crazy.*

Course Objectives:

*Families are constituted in and through human communication; therefore, this course will examine the various perspectives, theories, relationships, and research providing the foundation for our study of communication and the family. Focus throughout the course will be on the critical appraisal of theories and research; thus, an engaged discussion and active participation will be expected from every student. We will discuss several elements of family communication, including *definitions* of the family; legal, social, cultural, and religious *messages* about the family; the communication of family *rules, stories, and secrets*; and *communication related variables* in various family subsystems. We will also examine theory and research relevant to *family relationships* that have been historically understudied, e.g., siblings, grandparents, in-laws, and others who are part of the richness of family life.*

Required Text:

Segrin, C., & Flora, J. (2019). *Family communication, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* New York: Routledge.

Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (Eds.) (2014). *Widening the family circle: New research on family communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Assumptions and Expectations:

*This class in family communication is a 4000 level, senior level course; therefore, it will be a discussion-oriented, seminar-type experience in which you can expect to be assigned and/or called upon to explain, evaluate, discuss, and offer your *informed* opinion on many of the theories and models presented in class. This will require you to read, re-read, and maybe even re-read for a third time chapters and articles that are on the table for discussion. My expectations are listed below:*

1. Attendance: This is simple: All I ask is that you show up for every class meeting prepared to do your best. You have two (2) absences for this class to use at your discretion—no questions asked. *Starting with your third absence, you will lose two points per absence on your final course grade.*

2. Class Participation: This is a communication department course; thus, we will be communicating a lot in this class. Not just me, but you--ALL of you. Your participation is critical for a fun and intellectually stimulating class experience. Your personal and academic success in this course will depend upon the level of class participation you engage in during the semester. Always come prepared.

3. Electronic Equipment: PLEASE turn off and stow all electronic devices, e.g., cell phones, laptops, MP3 players, pagers, Blackberry's, GPS devices, Netbooks, iPads, iPhones, iPods, Kindle Fire readers, portable DVD players, alarm clocks, digital video camcorders, Bluetooth headsets, Beats wireless headphones by Dr. Dre, Wii Fit Plus Balance Boards, handheld Nintendo/PlayStation/Sony/Xbox video game consoles, digital picture frames, paper shredders, wireless surveillance/security monitors, 3D printers, Amazon Echo Alexa voice controlled speakers, night vision goggles, etc. If you cannot exist for 75 minutes without some type of electronic connection to the outside world, then perhaps this is not the best time to participate in this course (and you need extensive psychotherapy). Plus, as you will learn, current studies show overuse of cell phones is correlated with a number of negative outcomes, including depression, loneliness, and decreased levels of relational satisfaction with your family.

4. Assignments: All assignments and exams are to be completed on time. All late work will be penalized 10 points for every day the work is late.

5. Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: The core values of The University of Texas at Tyler are integrity, optimism, curiosity, accountability, leadership, initiative, and development. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values. All students must adhere to the UT- Tyler Honor Code ("Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor accept the actions of those who do"). Furthermore, students must complete their work with academic integrity as outlined at <http://www.uttyler.edu/judicialaffairs/scholasticdishonesty.php>. All students are expected to maintain absolute honesty and integrity in academic work undertaken at UT Tyler.

Plagiarism is the act of representing, either directly or indirectly, and without proper source documentation, someone else's work as your own. I will not tolerate plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty. Students caught participating in any form of academic dishonesty will be removed from the course and will receive an "F." Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

Furthermore, said student will be subject to suspension or dismissal from the Communication Department and/or the university. Finally, I will use the Turn-It-In application to check for plagiarism in your papers and original coursework. Not understanding plagiarism or other aspects of the honor code is not an excuse. You may use online resources to study for this course, but you must do so in ways that are consistent with all aspects of the University Honor Code.

6. Student Behavior: All students will be expected to treat each other (and me) with respect, courtesy, and openness. All points of view are welcome and needed to get the most we can from our class meetings. You may not always agree with everything said and that is OK. But, just because you do not agree does not give license to ridicule, belittle, marginalize, or embarrass anyone else. Students who can not or will not agree to this idea of open exchange and encounter should leave now. Disruptive students will also be asked to leave the class. No one has all the answers and just because you think you are right, does not mean anyone else does. Let us agree to treat each other with a high degree of integrity and respect as we share the semester together.

7. Elasticity Clause: I reserve the right to modify the existing course calendar and assignments. If changes must be made, I will notify students as soon as possible.  
Know my favorite proverb by heart: *Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be bent out of shape.*

8. Military Student Advisory: Veterans and active duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, any special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations).

9. Course Requirements: Your grade in this course will come from four sources: two examinations, an original research prospectus, and a series of short (3-5 pages) reaction papers that you will write periodically throughout the semester. Each exam will cover approximately half of the reading and discussion material. The exams and projects are all worth 100 points each.

The University Library system has a number of resources that will be important for you as you work to complete this course, including a number of scholarly journals dedicated to the study and understanding of family life, e.g., *Journal of Family Communication*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Also, students are encouraged to use the Psych-Info and/or Google Scholar academic journal search engine to find scholarly articles and books focused on the family. If our library does not have the article, inter-library loan will most likely be able to find it for you. Your final grade will be determined by your total number of points. I do not apply a curve to any assignments or exams. Thus, your final grade will follow the scale below:

Grades: Standard Grading Scale

90% - 100 %	= A	70% - 79%	= C	59% - 0%	= F
80% - 89%	= B	60% - 69%	= D		

Communication and the Family Original Research Prospectus:

Your major assignment for the semester will be the construction of an original research project prospectus focused on some aspect of communication and the family.

This assignment is designed to get you thinking about research in the field of family communication. As such, it will ask you to construct an original research proposal for a study you are interested in conducting.

NOTE: *You will not actually conduct the proposed study; rather you will simply create the prospectus for your proposed study in which you describe and explain your ideas, arguments, and methods for conducting the study at some future point in time.*

This project will be completed in *five key stages* as we progress through the semester.

STAGE 1--TOPIC: In stage one of the original prospectus project, you will need to identify the specific topic that will serve as the primary focus of your research proposal.

A. This is asking for a *topic*, not a subject. Some examples:

Subject—Sibling Relationships

Topic—*Solidarity and satisfaction within the brother/brother sibling dyad*

Subject—Gay and Lesbian Families

Topic—*Influence of fathering communication styles between heterosexual and homosexual fathers and their sons*

Subject—Family Secrets

Topic—*Psychosocial outcomes associated with keeping and revealing family secrets*

B. No one will be allowed to work on the same specific topic

C. Once a topic has been approved, it is off the table—thus, we will use the old first come/first served rule in determining topic allocation

D. Topics must be specifically focused on a key, clearly identified variable(s) of communication within the family

E. Final topic selection will be due, in class, on Thursday, January 27, 2022.

F. Total Points Available: 20 points

**STAGE 2--RESEARCH LITERATURE:** After you have determined a specific and focused topic for your project, you will need to establish what we already know about your general subject and/or topic area. Once you are familiar with what has already been discovered about your general subject and/or topic area, you will be in a much better position to determine what else we need to know, what is missing from the extant literature, or how your research can extend and build upon what has already been established.

A. Construct a list of 10 references on your topic from these three sources ONLY: (1) scholarly journal articles, (2) scholarly books, and/or (3) scholarly book chapters on your topic area.

B. Provide the source citation in APA style (see below) and then in one paragraph, explain what you have learned from this source that informs your research topic, i.e., how does this source help advance your project idea?

C. These works must be from scholarly, academic journals or books, not from popular press, self-help, or Oprah/Dr. Phil junk. And just because a publication has the word “journal” in it, does not make it a scholarly journal, e.g. *Ladies Home Journal*, *Wall Street Journal*.

A few other exclusions:

1. No Dissertation Abstracts (or thesis abstracts)
2. No conference/seminar/symposia papers
3. No internet sources, websites, blogs, etc.
4. No foreign language journals (unless you speak that language or it is translated into English)
5. No sources more than 20 years old

D. Present your source references in APA style format—no exceptions.

Here are examples of citations in APA format:

Smith, J. A. (2010). Finding our fathers and mothers when they are lost. *Journal of Family Communication*, 23, 175-185.

Smith, J. A., & Jones, P. K. (2010). Finding our children when they are lost. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79, 334-350.

Smith, J. A., Jones, P. K., & Parker, T. J. (2010). Finding our grandparents when they are lost. *Journal of Family Studies*, 45, 1201-1230.

Smith, J. A. (2010). *Finding relatives who are lost*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, J. A., & Parker, T. J. (2010). Finding our cousins when they are lost. In D. E. Prescott & T. D. Romo (Eds.), *Close family relationships: Finding lost relatives* (pp. 365-379). Dallas, TX: Taylor & Francis.

You may also go to *Google* and simply type in “APA style”.

D. The source references will be due, in class, on Thursday, February 10, 2022.

E. Total Points Available: 20 points

**STAGE 3--QUESTION(S):** Now that you have both a clearly focused topic and are familiar with the scholarly literature on it, this is the point where you will need to get original and explain your thesis, purpose, and main question(s) for your proposed research study. In the world of social science research, *questions trump answers at this point*; therefore, the most important part of this stage of your prospectus development is that you craft clear and well focused *questions* about your topic. You already know what has been discovered or determined about your topic, but now, what else do we need to know? What questions are left un-answered? What do you want to know about this particular topic or family communication variable, relationship, etc.? Ask a question or two or three and then attempt to justify and argue for why your question is important, significant, and why we need to know this.

A. I will distribute a worksheet for this particular stage of your original research prospectus; all you will need to do is respond to the questions on the worksheet

B. Your worksheet will be due, in class, on Thursday, March 3, 2022.

C. Total Points Available: 20 points

**STAGE 4--METHODOLOGY:** Key to any research project is the question of how it will be conducted, i.e., how will you attempt to answer the questions you have proposed? The question of methodology is critical because the manner in which you collect your data and the ethical considerations surrounding your method become key considerations for how any outcomes of your study are perceived and/or understood. Therefore, this stage of the project asks you to consider how you will conduct your study?

Most methodology sections of scholarly articles contain four key areas of description:

- i. Participants—who will be participating in your study?
- ii. Procedures—what will you ask them to do?
- iii. Measures—what tools will be used to measure the key variables in your study?
- iv. Analysis—how will you analyze or assess any data collected?

- A. These four areas will be the focus of this stage of your original research prospectus, i.e., you will craft responses to each of these key sections.
- B. I will distribute an example Methods section for your consideration.
- C. The methodology section will be due, in class, on Thursday, March 24, 2022.
- D. Total Points Available: 20 points

**STAGE 5--FINAL OUTLINE:** The last stage of your original research prospectus will be to pull together the previous four stages into one formal outline.

- A. Create a cover sheet in APA style:

Title of Paper  
 Author  
 University Affiliation  
 Identification of the paper and its purpose  
 Date  
 Author Notes

- B. Construct an outline that includes three key sections: (1) opening arguments and reasons/support for the study, review of relevant supporting literature, and key questions or predictions; (2) methodology, (3) works cited
- C. The outlines/papers must be (1) single authored, (2) the final outline must be at least 10 pages in length, (3) it must conform to APA style for format and referencing, and (4) it must include a complete and accurate set of references. Key considerations are that the paper demonstrates *original thought* and a good command of the relevant literature.
- d. The final prospectus outline will be due, in class, on Thursday, April 21, 2022.
- E. Total Points Available: 20 points

Course Evaluation:

<u>Course Grades</u>	<u>Points Available</u>
1. Mid-Term Exam	100 points
2. Final Exam	100 points
3. Original Research Prospectus	100 points
4. Reaction Papers	<u>100 points</u>
TOTAL	400 points

## Tentative Daily Course Calendar—Spring 2022

Note: S/F = Segrin and Flora (2019) textbook readings  
F/M = Floyd and Morman (2014) textbook readings

T Jan 11	Welcome & Course Introduction
Th 13	What Is Human Communication?
T 18	Family Perception: Challenges in the definition of family—S/F 1
Th 20	Family Perception: Challenges in the definition of family—S/F 1
T 25	Family Perception: Theoretic treatments of the family—S/F 2
Th 27	Family Perception: Theoretic treatments of the family—S/F 2
T Feb 1	Family Functioning: Rules, Roles, & Rituals—S/F 3
Th 3	Family Functioning: Stories & Secrets—S/F 3
T 8	Family Functioning: Stress & Coping—S/F 10 & 11
Th 10	Family Functioning: Conflict & Violence—S/F 4 & 16
T 15	Family Functioning: Conflict & Violence—S/F 4 & 16
Th 17	Family Functioning: Physical Health—S/F 14 & 15
T 22	Family Functioning: Mental Health—S/F 14 & 15
Th 24	Midterm Exam
T Mar 1	Family Relationships: Mothers & Daughters—F/M 1 & S/F 7
Th 3	Family Relationships: Mothers & Sons—F/M 1 & S/F 7
T 8	SPRING BREAK!
Th 10	SPRING BREAK!
T 15	Family Relationships: Fathers & Daughters—F/M 8
Th 17	Family Relationships: Fathers & Sons—F/M 8 & S/F 7
T 22	Family Relationships: Siblings—F/M 2 & 7; S/F 8
Th 24	Family Relationships: Sibling-In-Law—F/M 2 & 7; S/F 8
T 29	Family Relationships: Extended Family Relationships--F/M 3, 4, 5, 6; S/F 9
Th 31	Family Relationships: Extended Family Relationships--F/M 3, 4, 5, 6; S/F 9
T Apr 5	Family Relationships: Marriage—S/F 6
Th 7	Family Relationships: Marriage—S/F 6
T 12	Family Relationships: Divorce—S/F 12
Th 14	Family Relationships: Divorce—S/F 12



T 19            Family Relationships: Step Families & Adoption—F/M 10, 11, & 12; S/F13  
Th 21           Family Relationships: Step Families & Adoption—F/M 10, 11, & 12; S/F13

Final Exam--TBD