

Medical Communication (COMMRC 1135)

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COURSE OUTLINE

Course Overview:

This experiential learning course is designed to increase student knowledge and awareness of how communication skills directly affect medical outcomes, satisfaction, and overall health. It seeks to teach communication theory and methodology as it relates to the unique context of the medical relationship. It then attempts to apply this knowledge to situations and relationships specific to each student's past experiences and future professional goals. In short, this course seeks to help students apply knowledge discovered through research, discussion, observation, and analysis to this ever changing and expanding, interdisciplinary field in an effort to improve patient care and overall health outcomes.

Vitally important to the perspective of this course is the desire to see health communication not only from the perspective of the professional but from that of the patient as well. This is a multidisciplinary course that values multiple, inter-locking perspectives. Again, the goal is to improve awareness and understanding of the entire process of medical communication. To know how to facilitate effective medical outcomes, all parties must be willing to share in the skill building and application of the fundamental communication principles discussed throughout this course.

The primary goal is a practical one. The success in acquiring this goal and teaching others how to do the same depends upon the determination and commitment of each individual participant.

Course Objectives:

1. To increase students' knowledge of medical communication theory and research.
2. To apply this knowledge effectively within medical communication contexts.
3. To evaluate effectively other's use of medical communication skills.
4. To demonstrate the use of oral history methodology when discussing a medical communication topic.
5. To synthesize this entire learning process in an effort to demonstrate effective communication techniques within medical contexts.

Required Text:

Polack, E. Phillips and Theodore A. Avtgis. *Medical Communication: Defining the Discipline*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2011.

This text comes with a one-time online access code. Please access the online content that accompanies this text to obtain PowerPoints, pre- and post-chapter tests, flashcards, outlines, and video materials. If needed, help is available from Kendall Hunt with any of these electronic resources. Please contact the company or the instructor for any additional problems. *Note that you will not be required to purchase a text with the online code, however, in doing so you will greatly increase your chance of succeeding in this course.*

BlackBoard Availability:

The materials for this course are available on BlackBoard and may be located by going to <http://courseweb.pitt.edu/>. All students are encouraged to use this source for copies of course materials, class announcements, extra links, resources, and general information about medical communication applications and jobs. The website is also available for students to use for discussion boards if anyone so chooses. Students should see the instructor if there are any problems with access to this site.

Speaking Enhanced Course Designation:

This course qualifies for speaking enhanced status for all students who still need to meet this criteria for graduation.

Note that in order to achieve speaking enhanced status, a course must provide on-going speaking assessment. This is one of many reasons why class attendance and participation is graded on a daily basis. Students wishing to view their progress are always welcome (and encouraged) to do so upon request. Likewise there are two graded, individual speech assignments throughout the semester as well. (See below.)

Class Attendance Grade (5%):

An experiential learning course requires students to be present **each** day and achieve in the exercises and discussions for each day. Therefore, a daily grade will be given to each student for attendance, worth 5% of the overall grade for the course. If there is an absence, no credit for **any** work done during that period will be given. Likewise, it is the students' responsibility to acquire missed lecture materials and notes from a classmate *prior* to approaching the instructor for individualized help.

Although students do not have to tell the instructor the reason for their absence, it would be greatly appreciated. (See below for "rewards system" built into the participation grade.) Students who are involved with sports, career days, illnesses, or other such legitimate and/or unavoidable excuses should approach the instructor if at all possible ahead of time and will be awarded accordingly for their consideration. Certainly the instructor reserves the right to deal with special cases and prolonged absences according to her discretion and to her right for consultation with the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Janet Grady. Again, special needs should be brought to her attention as soon as possible in the semester or in the face of problems.

The following numeric grading system will be used: There are 14 regular classes. *For each class, roll will be taken twice: once at the beginning of the class period and once immediately after the break.* This is an experiential course, which means, student participation within each class period is necessary for full learning and development of course theory, research, and application. Grades are earned according to how many classes students are present for a total of 14 full classes (or 28 half classes). Since each class represents a full week of material, it is imperative that all students attend the full three hour class period each week in order to achieve full attendance credit. Actual grades will be based upon flat percentage grades similar to the grade distribution of the overall course grades with + and – grades awarded accordingly.

Grading system rubric:

28 half classes attended = 28/28 or 100% = A+ or 0 absences—attended 14/14 weeks of classes
 27 half classes attended = 27/28 or 96% = A or 1 absence
 26 half classes attended = 26/28 or 93% = A- or 2 absences—attended 13/14 weeks of classes
 25 half classes attended = 25/28 or 89% = B+ or 3 absences
 24 half classes attended = 24/28 or 86% = B or 4 absences—attended 12/14 weeks of classes
 23 half classes attended = 23/28 or 82% = B- or 5 absences
 22 half classes attended = 22/28 or 79% = C+ or 6 absences—attended 11/14 weeks of classes
 21 half classes attended = 21/28 or 75% = C or 7 absences
 20 half classes attended = 20/28 or 71% = C- or 8 absences—attended 10/14 weeks of classes
 19 half classes attended = 19/28 or 68% = D+ or 9
 18 half classes attended = 18/28 or 64% = D or 10 absences—attended 9/14 weeks of classes
 17 half classes attended = 17/28 or 61% = D- or 11 absences
 16 half classes attended = 16/28 or 57% = F or 12 absences—attended 8/14 weeks (half) of classes

*0 to 11 classes attended or 9 or more weeks of classes missed equals 0% or an **F for the entire course.***

Students who miss a class for ANY reason (including a legitimate absence) are marked absent. Make-up classes can only be achieved by attending an outside presentation ***pre-agreed upon*** by the professor and student. Additional possible make-up options may be made available later in the semester. Students may bank such acceptable “extra” classes in case of a pre-planned or emergency absence occurring within the semester. “Legitimate absences,” as determined by the ***instructor*** are only considered in light of participation grades. See below.

Instructor Absence: Please note that some classes may be missed by the instructor due to her participation in communication/medical conferences or even due to an illness/emergency. If this occurs, special arrangements will be made for the missed course content. If these arrangements are made outside of the regularly scheduled class time, students will not be required to attend these but may use these only as “make-up” classes towards the overall course grade. Each faculty absence will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and with the best interests of the students kept in mind. Those who wish to discuss these arrangements are asked to contact the instructor directly.

Participation (5%):

Participation is also based on a 14 class (28 half class) total with each half class being worth 5 points. Each day is graded in the following manner: Five points are earned for active participation, 4 for moderate, 3 for occasional, 2 for merely attending but not participating orally, 1 for an excused absence, and 0 for an unexcused absence. It is felt that students’ letting the instructor know why they miss class is a common

courtesy. It shows responsibility and respect for the importance of class work to the instructor as well as to their fellow students. Likewise, students arriving late or leaving early for class can only earn a maximum of 3 points per half class. ***It is advised that tardy students write their name and time arrived on a small piece of paper and hand this in to the instructor at the end of class.*** This assures the students that proper credit will be given.

Scores are tallied for each day and a final percentage grade is calculated. The total score possible is 28 X 5 or 140 points. Another way of looking at this is to view class as a daily 10-point participation quiz. Remember that these points add up and are very important to students' final grades! Students may request to review their grades at any time.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to deal with extenuating circumstances according to her discretion. An example of such a circumstance would be an extended hospitalization.

Two Examinations (20% each):

All examinations will be given either during the class or final examination periods. The format of each exam will be objective and will test student reading of the text and attention during classroom lectures and discussions. Well in advance of each exam, the format and length of the exam will be discussed. Since this is an evening class, all exams will be given at the end of the period based upon the length of the exam and time allowed.

Oral History Research Paper (30%):

Early in the semester each student will identify a person to interview (called the "Narrator"). There are two options for doing this interview:

OPTION ONE: The person may be someone you know personally but ***may not be an actual patient of yours from your past or present work within any healthcare setting.*** (This is extremely important due to maintaining HIPPA standards.) Preferably the narrator is someone you know who suffers from an illness and/or disease that may be psychological and/or physiological in nature. It is preferred that he/she is in the midst of dealing with this problem, though it is possible to interview someone who has been "cured" or "healed" of the disease. It is also preferred that you interview this narrator in person, though electronic interactions involving Skype and/or phone conversations may be permitted if absolutely necessary. (Recording of these electronic interviews is still required.)

The objective is to interview the narrator in order to identify ***what it is like to live with this illness***, how he/she reacted to finding out about this illness, how the narrator was treated by the healthcare professionals and others involved with his/her care, what it means to continue to face this health related problem, how the future looks in living with this illness, and how the narrator might behave differently if he/she would have known what he/she does now about this illness. Basically, the objective is to find out what it means to experience the illness and not just be treated for the disease.

Students should choose a topic area that is related to their desired profession or particular area of interest within healthcare. For instance, a nursing student may wish to study diabetes within the elderly population. The student will then do research in two areas: (1) prepare a works cited list of resources concerning the topic of interest and (2) identify a person who may be able to provide personal accounts of what it is really

like to live with the diabetes as an elderly person (in this example). The interview will follow oral history methodology and will be recorded and transcribed. As the student explores the person's history and reviews the transcripts, a paper will be developed that discusses how the interview reflects upon the patient story articulated within the interview.

OPTION TWO: Some students may prefer studying an aspect of healthcare that relates to new technologies, methodologies, or professional changes that do not specifically involve a disease itself. This may be the case with a Communication Major who wishes to pursue communication concepts that affect health delivery systems such as in the use of computers as part of the medical exam, narrative in medicine, mobile apps in health, or privacy when using FaceBook or Twitter. In this case the interview would surround the narrator's experience in using these forms of communication in attempting to care for patients. Instead of a study of a disease, this would be *a study of the technology associated with the disease*. In any event, the interview would surround how people have used technology in communicating with patients, how effective this has been, what new trends may be in the future, how problems emerge when using the technology, what solutions may be available or needed, and so on.

Research for option two would include (1) scholarly journals about communication in healthcare when using this technology and (2) an interview with a person involved with this health-related form of communication with patients.

General Assignment: A 7-10+ page paper which includes a brief literary review of the topic explored (mentioning at least 5 scholarly sources—especially including Communication sources), a discussion and incorporation of personal quotes from the transcription, and a final statement about what was learned about this disease that may or may not have been reflected in the scholarly sources. The key research question, for instance, may be, “How does my narrator support or refute the existing literature and research in this field?”

Requirements: Several items must be turned in at pre-designated due dates throughout the semester: (1) 7-10 page paper, (2) works cited sheet, (3) at least 3 pages of transcribed quotes, (4) the electronic interview, (5) all permission forms required for oral history methodology.

Final Individual Research Presentation (20%):

On the day the written assignment is handed in, a 6-7 minute presentation will be given by each student which highlights the topic, basic research question, summary of key research, exemplary quotes from the interview(s), and concluding remarks about how well the cited materials reflect the information gleaned from the oral history interview. The purpose of this assignment is to share with the audience what was learned and to provide personal insight into the lives of those interviewed.

An evaluation form will be provided that assesses content, organization, and delivery. No visual aids will be required for this presentation. Quotes and even audio recordings are encouraged to reflect the “voice” of the narrator. Further discussion concerning the written and oral portion of this assignment will be provided early in the semester. Note that a sample paper is on file on BlackBoard.

Journal (Grade Weight Option of 20%):

This option allows you to substitute 20% of your total grade towards any one of your lower grades in the class except for class participation and attendance. You will complete the optional journal as described below. I will grade it and substitute that grade for your LOWEST grade. You cannot do worse. You can only stay the same or do better.

Do note that you may not use this as a substitute for any assignment. You must, for example, still do your speech presentation, take all your exams, and do the final paper. However, this should give you a sense of security in that if you do poorly on one of the assignments, you do not have to do poorly for the entire course. Remember this is an option and not required!

The content of this journal should include two key items:

- (1) Comment on **at least five articles** from a group of articles provided for you on blackboard or from an article of your choice (that is pre-approved by the professor). The following information must be included in at least three to five paragraphs (2-3 typed pages): Summarize the content of the article. Comment on how and why you think this article might contribute to our knowledge of communication and medicine (mentioning both).
- (2) Identify (**at least five**) times throughout your past or during the semester in which you witnessed communication to be a problem (or a success) within a medical-related situation. Describe each example, tell what went well and/or what did not go so well, and discuss ideas for improvement (or ways to be sure you follow the same example). Each example/discussion should be about a page long.

Please note that this should end up about 20 pages long (typed and sent in electronically by the last day of classes—not finals week). It is not meant to be a formal paper, but rather it is meant to be a series of comments and reflections that show you understand communication as it applies to medicine.

Late Grades or Assignments:

All assignments must be handed in and tests taken when scheduled. It is not fair for one student to take more time with an assignment or studying than another. If students sign up for a presentation/paper on a specific date, they are saying that they agree to the designated due date of that assignment. Therefore, unless a signed doctor's excuse is presented, students will receive an automatic 0 (F) for the missed or late grade. Extenuating, serious situations will be reviewed at the discretion of the instructor.

Grade Summary:

Attendance	5%
Participation:	5%
Exam One:	20%
Exam Two:	20%
Final Individual Research Paper:	30%
Final Individual Research Presentation:	20%
Journal Option	20% (Optional Substitution)

Grading Scale (for all evaluations including the final grade):

A+ -98 -100%	B+ -88 - 89%	C+ -78 - 79%	D+ -68 - 69%	F -0-59%
A -93 - 97%	B -83 - 87%	C -73- 77%	D -63-67%	
A- -90 - 93%	B- -80 - 82%	C- -70 - 72%	D- -60 - 62%	

Disability Accommodation:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Health and Counseling Services, G-10 Student Union, 814-269-7119 as early as possible in the term. The Office of Health and Counseling Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

CLASSROOM RESPECT: Cell Phones, E-Books, Laptops, iPods, et al.:

Due to an unprecedented increase in student use of electronic communication within the classroom, a very strict policy will be enforced concerning student usage. Absolutely no electronic devices will be permitted to be exposed during class time unless specifically requested, approved by the instructor, and needed by the individual for learning purposes.

Indeed this is a communication course and it means that students must learn what it means to communicate with respect, full attention, and compassion towards those who are speaking. Listening happens with the eyes and the ears. In order to pick up on all verbal and nonverbal communication cues, attention must not be diverted to electronic devices. This indeed is a changing world; but such changes can degenerate the very quality of communication that the electronic device is said to enhance. Much research has been presented in this area. Students are asked to follow this rule, to respect others in the classroom (especially the presenters) and to eliminate the use of electronic devices. If a necessary call is expected or emergency takes place, keep the phone on vibrate and walk out of the classroom to respond. This should minimize classroom disruption. Do not even check the phone in class.

Again, please eliminate the use of all electronic devices within the classroom. Although it is possible that students may wish to follow along with the BlackBoard PowerPoints, it is expected that students not use their computers in the class in order that a widely communicative, distraction-free environment may be achieved. Far too often students use the PowerPoints as an excuse to check email or facebook during class time, which is distracting not only to the user but to those surrounding the user as well. Because of this tendency, students are asked to run off handouts and PowerPoints (when applicable) in hard copy form for use in class if necessary. Under no circumstance should a student use a cell phone or any other electronic device during a group speech performance unless it is approved specifically for disability accommodation purposes. (See above.)

Cell phones are not permitted in class. Please turn off electronic devices and be fully attentive and respectful during all class periods. Please be considerate.

Students who expose and/or use electronic devices (unless specifically asked to do so by the professor) will be given a zero for that day's class participation grade.

Special Note:

Most students want a good grade. Some define the term, "good," differently. Ask yourself what grade you wish to achieve and study this syllabus in an effort to determine ahead of time what you will be required to do in order to achieve this goal. I wish you all a "good" grade but most of all a stimulating, enjoyable, beneficial, and practical learning experience. Welcome to all of you!