COMM 601
Lifespan Communication Theory and Research
Fall 2011

COURSE SYLLABUS

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Course Description

This course takes a developmental approach to the study of communication by exploring the culminating effects of communication as it evolves across our lifetime. Lifespan communication emphasizes the adaptive nature of human interaction across family, work, social, health, and spiritual domains. It encompasses all phases of life from childhood throughout elder adulthood and all channels of communication from nonverbal, to face-to-face, and mediated. The theory and research focus will provide students with tools to investigate and appreciate the complexities of human communication at different life stages. Lifespan Communication Theory and Research provides a survey of the topics, concepts, theories and theorists concerned with human communication across the lifespan.

We will survey foundational and contemporary theories of lifespan communication. While the class will focus on communication, theories are also drawn broadly from influential disciplines such as social and developmental psychology, gerontology, nursing, and family and human development.

As a starting point, the course will proceed from the following set of assumptions (Baltes, 1987)
1) Positive development occurs throughout the lifespan
2) Diversity and pluralism occur in the changes throughout life
3) Development is best viewed as a gain-loss dynamic
4) Inter-and intra-individual diversity exists as we progress through the lifespan
5) A person-environment interaction cannot be ignored in our explanations of development (in addition to face to face human communication and nonverbal communication, this includes virtual, digital, and mediated environments).

Learning Objectives

The following objectives frame the content of the course and form the basis upon which student learning is assessed.

1. Demonstrate an understanding of classic and contemporary theories of human development as applied to communication
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of communication as a lifespan developmental process
3. Demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts, primary theories, and approaches to the study of lifespan communication processes
4. Demonstrate an understanding of theories of peer-group communication
5. Demonstrate an understanding of theories of communication and aging
6. Demonstrate an understanding of ways to facilitate positive lifespan communication development
7. Demonstrate an awareness of connections between theories and concepts of lifespan communication and digital media
8. Demonstrate an awareness of some of the key elements of successful socialization as a communication professional specializing in lifespan/digital communication

Readings

Student learning is facilitated by means of four required books (available at the university bookstore as well as numerous online resources) as well as student-selected journal articles, book chapters, and books used in class assignments. In the order they will be used in the course, these books are:

Salkind, N. (2004). *An introduction to theories of human development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pecchioni, L., Wright, K. B., & Nussbuam, J. (2005). *Lifespan communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sunwolf. (2008). *Peer groups: Expanding our study of small group communication.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harwood, J. (2007). *Understanding communication and aging*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Assignments

The above learning objectives are realized via the readings as well as discussions and graded assignments (written and oral). Written assignments (with the exception of the curriculum vita) are to conform to the 6th edition of the *APA Publication Manual*, follow all applicable laws/policies concerning the ethical/legal use of copyrighted materials and the treatment of humans as participants in research. Failure to follow applicable laws/policies will result in sanctions that could include failure of the course and expulsion from the program. All assignments are given letter grades that are converted to numerical equivalents and then used in a weighted average calculation to determine the final course grade (assignment weights appear below).

I.   Lifespan Communication Short Papers:

   A. Understanding Lifespan Communication Stages (SP-1; 15%)
       *This short paper asks students to identify and review scholarly communication resources
       that pertain to childhood, adolescence, and later life.*
   B. Communication and My Peer Cohort (SP-2; 15%)
       *This short paper asks students to reflect on human and electronic communication taking
       place in the year of their birth.*

II. Professional Communication Development Short Assignments:

   A. Curriculum vita (PCD-1; 5%)
   B. Professional communication associations & Lifespan/Digital communication (PCD-2; 5%)

III. Lifespan Communication Development Individual Paper and Class Lecture (Paper-25%)
    *This paper asks students to select a communication process or phenomenon and using
    communication and related literatures trace its lifespan developmental arc as well as consider
    interventions facilitative of the positive development of the chosen process/phenomenon.*

IV. Lifespan Communication Group Project/Report—*Happy Homes* Virtual Project *(Group project-
     15%)*
     *The instructor will brief the students about a potential collaboration with colleagues at Hope
     College in Holland Michigan intended to focus on creating a virtual computer simulation
     designed to facilitate the development of positive family communication.*

V.   Final Exam (Final-20%)
     *A written exam given at the end of the course that covers the terminology and theories covered
     in the required readings.*

<p align="center">Policies</p>

Be Good Academic Citizens. Communication students and professors, as citizens of the academy, are
expected to uphold high standards of conduct towards each other, to serve as agents facilitative of
positive learning and to serve as positive ambassadors of the communication field. The university,
college, department and communication field reward good citizenry and sanction those who choose not
to uphold/follow rules that support good citizenry (e.g., engaging in unethical/un-civil/illegal behaviors).

Use Learning and Scholarly Resources Wisely and Competently. Class time, office hours, and time
devoted to informal extra-curricular activities are all finite and limited resources that are made available
to assist learning. It is important to make maximal, wise, and competent use of all available instructional
resources. Electronic tools such as cell phones, PDA's, laptop computers, and more should always be
used wisely, competently, and in socially appropriate ways. Society holds communication students and
professionals are to higher than average communication competency standards.

<u>Content Outline</u>

Week	Topic	Reading	
1 8/30	I. COMMUNICATION AS a LIFESPAN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS Foundations of Lifespan and Digital Communication		
2 9/6	II. Human Development and Human Communication A. Studying Human Development	Salkind 1-2	
3 9/13	B. Maturational & Biological approaches	Salkind 3-4	
4 9/20	C. Psychodynamic approaches	Salkind 5-6	SP1
5 9/26 9/27	**Professor Jon Nussbaum's Campus Visit** **Master's class—7 PM Burgess Room BAL 9th Floor** **President's Lecture—7 PM Ted Constant Convocation Center**		
6 10/4	D. Behavioral Perspectives E. Cognitive-Developmental approaches	Salkind 7-8 Salkind 9-10	
10/11	ODU fall Break		
7 10/18	III Lifespan Communication A. Overview B. Cognitive development and communication	Pecchioni 1 Pecchioni 2	PD-1
8 10/25	C. Language, Self, & Identity	Pecchioni 3 & Pecchioni 7	
9	D. Family E. Communication Processes	Pecchioni 4, 5, Pecchioni 7, 8, 9	
10 11/1	IV. Lifespan Communication: Age Cohorts and Peer Groups A. Peer group lens B. Childhood groups	 Sunwolf 1 Sunwolf 2	SP-2
11 11/8	C. Adolescence D. Neighborhoods & Super task groups	Sunwolf 3 Sunwolf 4 & 5	
12 11/15	V. Aging A. Perspectives, Approach, Framework	Harwood 1-4	

13 11/22	Intra-generational/Intergenerational Contexts/Technologies	Harwood -5 Harwood 10, 12	
14 11/29	Group Presentations		GP PD-2
15 12/6	Lifespan Communication Paper Symposium		Paper
16 12/13	Final Exam 7- 10 pm		Exam