

COM 4402: Health Communication ~ 4 Credits ~ Fall 2018

**Instructor: Robert Sidelinger**  
**E-mail: [sideling@oakland.edu](mailto:sideling@oakland.edu)**  
**Class Location/Time:**

**Office: Wilson Hall 306A**  
**Telephone: 248-370-4126**  
**Office Hours:**

Rationale:

Health communication is a vibrant and important field of study concerned with the ways in which humans communicate in social and mediated contexts to advance health care delivery and health promotion. Health communication is conceptualized as the central source for exploration, delivery and practice of communication messages and seeks to advance cultural processes that develop healthy individuals, relationships, and communities.

Catalog Description:

This course examines theory, research, and practice relevant to health communication. Topics include the role of communication in general models of health and illness, the relationship between patients and healthcare providers, social support, and health campaigns.

Course Description:

This course provides an overview of classic and contemporary literature in health communication. This course will familiarize students with the major topic areas, theories, and research in health communication utilizing interpersonal channels of communication. Topics include patient-health professional communication, health communication in families and intimate partner relationships, social support and caregiving, end of life communication, as well as health interventions and campaigns.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand how health is socially constructed.
2. Evaluate how technology, culture, and body politics (i.e. gendered bodies, stigma) affect such issues as doctor-patient relationships, health information seeking, social support, and health promotion.
3. Design communication competency interventions for healthcare providers and patients differently to promote collaborative care.
4. Define the role of social support in maintaining health and coping with illness.
5. Understand how health narratives function for teller and audience.

Required Textbook:

Bradley, K., Sparks, L., & O'Hair, H. D. (2013). *Health communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.

*Supplemental readings posted in Moodle*

### **Course Policies**

**Written Work:** As upper-level college students, you are expected to have developed a strong foundation in writing at this point in your academic career. You are expected to demonstrate continued improvement of your writing skills. All papers must follow APA 6th edition guidelines. The writing style, mechanics, and content are equally important.

**Oral Presentations:** As upper-level college students, you are expected to have developed a strong foundation in oral communication skills. Throughout the course, you will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate your oral communication competencies (e.g., classroom discussion, presentations). Your oral presentations should consider the purpose, topic, audience, and message in order to effectively create shared meaning in a clear and concise manner.

**Student Behavior:** You are expected to arrive to class on time and stay the entire time. We will maintain an open, yet respectful, and engaged, classroom environment. The respect should extend to those who are in the classroom (e.g., myself, other students) as well as those who are not a typical classroom member (e.g., other professors, guest speakers). A respectful and engaged environment is one where electronic devices are put away and side conversations do not occur. Students who engage in disruptive behavior may be directed to leave the class for the remainder of the class period. See the OU's Code of Student Conduct for further information on prohibited conduct.

**Missed/Late Assignments:** Unexcused late work will be penalized (10% for every day late), unless permission for an extended deadline is obtained beforehand. Extensions will be granted in rare situations only, due to family or personal emergencies. I ask that you keep me updated sooner rather than later in these situations. Also, if, at any time, you have concerns about the assignments or expectations, or if you are having trouble with the material or keeping up, please set up a time to meet with me!

**Plagiarism:** Following OU's stance on plagiarism: all members of the academic community at Oakland University are expected to practice and uphold standards of academic integrity and honesty. Academic integrity means representing oneself and one's work honestly.

Misrepresentation is cheating since it means the student is claiming credit for ideas or works not actually his or her own and is thereby seeking a grade that is not actually earned. Following are some examples of academic dishonesty:

1. Cheating on assignments and examinations. This includes but is not limited to the following when not authorized by the instructor: the use of any assistance or materials such as books and/or notes, acquiring exams or any other academic materials, the use of

any other sources in writing drafts, papers, preparing reports, solving problems, completing homework or carrying out other assignments. No student shall copy from someone else's work or help someone else copy work or substitute another's work as one's own. No student shall engage in any behavior specifically prohibited by an instructor in the course syllabus or class discussion.

2. Plagiarizing the work of others. Plagiarism is using someone else's work or ideas without giving that person credit. By doing this, a student is, in effect, claiming credit for someone else's thinking. Whether the student has read or heard the information used, the student must document the source of information. When dealing with written sources, a clear distinction should be made between quotations, which reproduce information from the source word-for-word within quotation marks, and paraphrases, which digest the source of information and produce it in the student's own words. Both direct quotations and paraphrases must be documented. Even if a student rephrases, condenses or selects from another person's work, the ideas are still the other person's and failure to give credit constitutes misrepresentation of the student's actual work and plagiarism of another's ideas. Buying a paper or using information from the Internet without attribution and handing it in as one's own work is plagiarism.

Failure to follow the above guidelines will result in the failure of the course, appearance before the judicial academic committee, and potentially expulsion and/or suspension from Oakland University. This class will follow these guidelines to the strictest level and will not allow for any dishonesty or cheating. If you are caught cheating or breaking any of the university's rules, you will be dealt with accordingly. Just don't cheat. Please refer to the academic conduct policy, found pp. 81-82 in the undergraduate catalog, print or online (<http://www2.oakland.edu/catalog/undergrad/app.pdf>), which lays out expectations and includes the consequences for dishonesty and cheating.

**Social Justice Guidelines:** OU is committed to social justice. This classroom will be a positive learning environment based on communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. OU does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

**Preferred Name and Preferred Gender Pronouns:** Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

**Accommodations:** A student with a documented learning or physical disability should contact the Office of Disability and Support Services, 121 North Foundation Hall, (248) 370-3266, and inform the professor of special needs during first few weeks of classes. For more information, visit <http://www.oakland.edu/dss>.

## Grading

**Attendance (30 points):** Your attendance is important to the successful completion of this course and will be recorded at each meeting. Much of the learning involves active participation in class discussions and activities. Because your participation in class discussions is essential to your learning, it is imperative that you attend each session. Timely, consistent physical presence for class sessions is a prerequisite for earning a desirable attendance grade.

Because this class meets three times a week, you are allotted three unexcused absences for the semester. Your absence does not excuse you from assignments that are due or assigned on days that you miss. Extenuating circumstances (documented) will also be taken into account. University excused absences applies to participation as an athlete, manager or student trainer in NCAA intercollegiate competitions, or participation as a representative of Oakland University at academic events and artistic performances approved by the Provost or designee. Please review attendance policies for an OU Excused Absence. The policy can be found at <http://www.oakland.edu/?id=6850&sid=175>. Arriving late or leaving early may result in a reduction in attendance points.

0/3 absences = 30 pts., 4 absences = 20 pts., 5 absences = 15 pts., 6 or more absences = 0 pts.

**Exams (300 points):** There will be three equally weighed exams in this course (100 points each). Exam items will include objective questions (multiple choice, true/false) and essay questions. Student can only make up an exam with a legitimate university excused absence and must schedule the make up during my office hours.

**Assignment 1 ~ Mini-Research Report on a Health Communication Issue (50 points):** Choose a topic in health communication in an interpersonal context that interests you and investigate it further. Your goal is to synthesize current research about this topic. Your 4- to 5-page paper should include at five to six scholarly, academic journal sources related to your topic.

**Assignment 2 ~ Advice Blog (30 points):** A primary criticism of communication research is that it is shared among academics in journals and at conferences and does not get translated or distributed in a way that actually helps the people we study. You will need to select topic from the readings that interests you and that you believe others would want advice about based on the existing research. This topic needs to be a different from your mini research paper.

You should write 1000- to 1250-word blog post that summarizes a research area and offers theoretical and evidence-based advice for health communication. This should be translated research for a general online audience. The advice blog should include at least four scholarly, academic journal sources related to your topic/advice. The hardcopy written versions are due beforehand for critique.

After you received your feedback, convert the scholarly articles into a popular press advice piece for an online audience. The purpose is to translate specialized scientific or technical writing to

make it accessible and attractive reading for a non- specialist audience, i.e., to readers outside of the discourse community.

Synthesize the selected articles for your general audience. Pay attention to your opening paragraph ("the lead"), where word choice and sentence progression are important devices to attract and retain readership.

“The most important sentence in any article is the first one. If it doesn't induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead. Also, if the second sentence doesn't induce [the reader] to continue to the third sentence, it's equally dead. Of such a progression of sentences, each tugging the reader forward until [...] safely hooked, a writer constructs that fateful unit: the “lead.”

Choose words carefully, expand text to provide parenthetical or sentence-length definitions of key concepts, but avoid jargon. You may need to use simile or metaphor or words that convey a strong visual connection to things your reader should be expected to be familiar with. You may, for example, compare a computer's CPU to a brain, although I hope you can do better than that in an effort to avoid tired clichés.

Your purpose is to communicate to your readers as human being to human being. Also, consider the title for your piece – it should draw your audience in – make them want to read your article.

Online Blogs: For the online version of the assignment, you need to include (non-copyrighted) images appropriate to the topic, voice, or advice in the blog. E-mail me a link to your online blog before the class meeting that it is due. You may use WordPress or Tumblr. Incorporate links to author bios on faculty webpages or to their Twitter accounts, etc. in your blog post. You will present your blog to the class.

Synthesize the information:

- What are the results saying about your topic?
- Do the studies agree or disagree?
- How do the studies fit together?
- Give advice that is supported by the research articles
- Put it into your own words; user friendly non-academic speech
- Start Writing
- Show why this topic applies to others
- Use a conversational tone
- Find ways to relate to readers
- End with advice, practical advice
- Cite arguments, findings, definitions, or advice given by others
- Include reference list

**Assignment 3 ~ “Health Communication Matters” Awareness Brochure (20 points):**

Building off of the topic you wrote about for your mini research paper or your advice blog, you

will design a brochure that highlights the importance of health communication to a specific audience. For example, I might design a brochure targeted toward encouraging medical practitioners to embrace palliative care and collaborative health communication. In this brochure, I might show two contrasting images – one where the patient looks like a puzzle, divided up with different type of practitioner labels on each part of the body (representing the current biomedical model) versus one where all those different providers are circled around and touching the patient (representing a patient-centered approach to palliative care). The point of this assignment is to persuade specific others about the importance of a particular aspect of health communication, make them aware of health communication, and show them why health communication matters. You will present your brochure to the class.

**Assignment 4 ~ Discussion Leader (10 points):** Each student will be part of a four-person group that is responsible for presenting and leading discussion around one week’s readings. The discussion will be led for the first hour of class (60 minutes long). High quality presentations include 1) a handout that summarizes key points; 2) questions for discussion or activities to promote student engagement with the readings; 3) additional relevant material to guide and provoke discussion. These materials must be turned in during the class session when the readings are under discussion.

A sign-up sheet will be available during the second week of the semester.

Exam 1	___/100
Exam 2	___/100
Exam 3	___/100
Mini Research Paper	___/50
Advice Blog	___/30
Brochure	___/20
Discussion Leader	___/10
<b>Total Points</b>	___/410

**Grading Scale.** Final grades will be based on the Oakland University Grading Scale based on 100%:

A = 100 - 96%	B+ = 89 - 87%	C+ = 79 - 77%	D+ = 69 - 67%	F = 59% or below
A - = 95 - 90%	B = 86 - 83%	C = 76 - 74%	D = 66 - 60%	
	B - = 82 - 80%	C - = 73 - 70%		

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Syllabus overview, Chapter 1: Overview of Communication and Health	
2	Chapter 2: Provider-Patient Perspectives; Cegala, D. J. (2011). An exploration of factors promoting patient participation in primary care medical interviews. <i>Health Communication, 26</i> , 427-436.	
3	Chapter 3: Caregiving and Communication; Miller, L. E., & Caughlin, J. P. (2013). "We're going to be survivors": Couples' identity challenges during and after cancer treatment. <i>Communication Monographs, 80</i> , 63-82.	
4	Chapter 4: Social Support and Health; Baiocchi-Wagner, E. A., & Talley, A. E. (2013). The role of family communication in individual health attitudes and behaviors concerning diet and physical activity. <i>Health Communication, 28</i> , 193-205.	Mini-Research Paper Due
5	Chapter 5: Culture and Diversity Issues in Healthcare	EXAM 1 (Chapters 1-4, posted articles)
6	Chapter 5 continued	
7	Chapter 6: Communication and Healthcare Organizations; Petronio, S. (2013). Brief status report on communication privacy management theory. <i>Journal of Family Communication, 13</i> , 6-14.	Advice Blog Due Discussion Leaders
8	Chapter 7: New Technologies and Health Communication; Braithwaite, D. O., Waldron, V. R., & Finn, J. (1999). Communication of social support in computer mediated groups for people with disabilities. <i>Health Communication, 11</i> , 123-151.	Discussion Leaders
9	Chapter 8: Mass Communication and Health; Southwell, B. G., & Yzer, M. C. (2007). The roles of interpersonal communication in mass media campaigns. <i>Communication Yearbook, 31</i> , 419-451.	Discussion Leaders
10	Chapter 9: Risk and Crisis Communication	EXAM 2 (Chapters 5-8, posted articles) Discussion Leaders
11	Chapter 9 continued	Discussion Leaders
12	Chapter 10: Health Campaigns and Community Health Initiatives; Scott, A. M., & Quick, B. L. (2012). Family communication patterns moderate the relationship between psychological reactance and willingness to talk about organ donation. <i>Health Communication, 27</i> , 702-711.	Discussion Leaders
13	Larson, D. G., & Tobin, D. R. (2000). End-of-life conversations: Evolving practice and theory. <i>JAMA, 284</i> , 1573-1578. Singer, P. A., Martin, D. K., & Kelner, M. (1999). Quality end-of-life care: Patients' perspectives. <i>JAMA, 281</i> , 163-168.	

14	Chapter 13: Looking Toward the Future of Health Communication Research; Duggan, A. (2006). Understanding interpersonal communication processes across health contexts: Advances in the last decade and challenges for the next decade. <i>Journal of Health Communication, 11</i> , 93-108.	Brochure Due
15		EXAM 3 (Chapters 9, 10, 13, posted articles)