

COMM 395: Communication and Health
Fall 2009
CRN: 74637
MWF 1:10-2:00
GBB Room 108

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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. Most obviously, they help us accomplish our basic goals in life by providing us with all kinds of “social support.” Less obviously, however, they provide us with 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. In general, this class is about how communication can make our lives happier, healthier, and more satisfying lives.

In this class, you will learn:

- How health is defined, and how it relates to social relationships.
- Why positive emotions are beneficial to experience and express as often as possible.
- How intimate communication benefits makes us physically and psychologically healthy.
- Why it can be healthy to express affection and gratitude to others when you have the opportunity.
- Why social relationships are essential to graceful aging.
- How our health is related to communication in the public arena.
- How one’s biological sex can change the impact of various communicative activities on one’s health.
- Various ways in which research on health and communication can be conducted.

Required Readings

Vaillant, G. E. (2002). *Aging well: Surprising guideposts to a happier life from the landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co.

Readings on electronic reserve at the Mansfield Library:

E-res password: comm395

See the “Course Readings” handout on the course website for a full bibliography for each lesson.

Assignments

Savoring Communication (25 points possible)

Communication is ubiquitous, kind of like the air we breathe. We know it's important, but it often fades into the background of our normal habits and routines. Yet, amazing positive (and negative) things can happen in ordinary, everyday talk. The purpose of this assignment is to take some time to appreciate – savor – a positive communication experience. You might find it interesting and useful to read Seligman (2002). *Chapter 7: Happiness in the present* (on reserve) before you begin this assignment.

According to Seligman (2002), four types of savoring are possible: (1) Basking (allowing one's self to be doused with praise and congratulations); (2) Thanksgiving (experiencing and communicating gratitude for good things), (3) marveling (being awed by even the simplest aspects of the experience); and (4) luxuriating (using all of your senses to appreciate the moment). Seligman (2002) suggests doing the following to savor experiences in those ways:

- (1) *Share with others*: Take a moment to not only be around another person, but also tell them how much you value your time with them.
- (2) *Memory-build*: Try to capture a snapshot of the moment in your mind, and/or take a physical “souvenir” of the experience with you.
- (3) *Congratulate yourself*: Take pride in your abilities and accomplishments, and try to notice other people being impressed with you.
- (4) *Sharpen your perceptions*: Slow the moment down and notice the details of your experience. “Consume” the experience, as if you were tasting a desert made with exotic, delicious ingredients, or drinking a rare wine. Look at it as if it were a beautiful painting that draws you in, or listen to it as you would the best song you've ever heard. Notice all the details; the slight nonverbal behaviors the person shows, the sound of the person's voice, the details of their clothing, hair, skin, and facial structure. Notice how the environment around you makes you feel; the lighting, temperature, things you are walking or resting on. Notice how the other person's behavior makes you feel each second.
- (5) *Get absorbed by the experience*: “Immerse” yourself in the moment; allow yourself let go of other responsibilities you have for the moment and let your senses take over.

So here are the instructions. Invite someone (ideally, it would be just one other person, but two or three other people are fine) to spend some face-to-face time with you; have a meal, go for a hike, or just sit somewhere for a bit and talk. Whatever you want to do together is fine. Once things are set in motion, begin savoring the experience using the five techniques listed above.

For your paper, I'd like you to re-savor the experience in writing. The best papers will be written with an almost poetic quality. There will be many details about the experience, showing sharpened perceptions and absorption into the experience. The best papers will also show examples of sharing with others, building memories, and self-congratulations during the experience. As you are describing the experience, think of yourself as trying to help your audience savor the experience as well.

As an aside, the benefit of doing this assignment is that it increases our perceptions of how much control we have over our lives. If we can harness our social lives to increase our positive experiences (i.e., feelings of pleasure, gratitude, connectedness, etc.), we likely build a buffer against stressful experiences and stand to gain increased health.

Healthy Relationships Program (Two parts; each part is worth 50 points, so 100 points total):

While a large part of this class involves learning about theory and research on health and communication, I also hope that you will leave the course being able to practice (and help others practice) healthy communication. Thus, the purpose of this assignment is for you to develop a workshop to teach people how to use communication to enhance the quality of their relationships through communication. By way of doing so, you'll become an expert on the connections between a specific type of communication and health outcomes. The assignment has two components: Research and presentation.

The research component is where you discuss research related to your topic. You'll describe: (a) The type of communicative activity you will help people improve upon (e.g., comforting, self-disclosure, emotional expression, humor, etc.), and (b) research showing the effects of that type of communicative activity on health and well-being. Feel free to use any of the readings from this class, and to ask me for suggestions of other readings for your paper. Otherwise, the purpose of this paper is for you to tell me about the connection between a specific type of communicative activity (of your choosing) and the specific health outcomes that might be correlated with the successful use of that type of communication.

In the presentation component, you will design and implement a program that will help people actually improve the quality of their relationships. Your program should help teach people how to competently practice the communicative activity you discussed in the research component. I will select the best programs for presentation in class at the end of the semester. A sample of an "A" paper can be found on E-Res, under the title, "A Good Sense of Humor Equals Good Health."

You may do this assignment as an individual, or in a group of three or four people.

Quizzes

Each week I will assign a short quiz to assess and increase your knowledge of the basic issues in the course readings.

The quizzes will be available on BlackBoard two days before we begin discussing a new topic. Generally, I will try to begin discussing a new topic each Monday, which means that I will generally have the weekly quiz available on Friday evening. Each quiz will remain available until 10 minutes prior to the class in which we will begin discussing the new topic.

All together, these quizzes will be worth 25 points.

Exams

Your knowledge about the role of communication in health will be assessed through three exams. Most of the questions will be multiple choice, but you should plan on having some questions that involve short written responses as well. Each exam will be worth 50 points. (150 points total)

Grade scale:

A = 270-300 B = 240-269 C = 210-239 D = 180-209 F = 179 and below

The plus/minus grading system is not used in this course.

Course Policies

(1) Attendance and Participation

Because the course involves discussion of the readings each week, attendance is essential. The quizzes will only be available until 10 minutes before class on the due date, so if you don't complete one, no points will be assigned. Of course there are several reasons to attend your classes beyond simply accumulating points. Be aware that you will need to understand the concepts behind, and know how to operate within, every topic we discuss in order to succeed on the exams and successfully complete the project. Of course, things come up that cause one to miss class. In such an event, *your* responsibility is to find out what you missed and to get the lecture notes from one of your classmates.

(2) Late Work

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.

Exceptions to the late penalty are not distributed freely. 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.

(3) Group collaboration

This course involves collaborative group engagement. You are expected to act responsibly and manage problematic issues as they arise (do not let them take care of themselves). Please contact me if you find yourself in a group that is having difficulties.

(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.

(5) Academic Misconduct: According to the 2009-2010 University of Montana Bulletin, "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.

- (6) **Incompletes:** See the *University of Montana Catalog* for more information. These are very rarely granted, and only under the most unique circumstances.
- (7) **Auditing and Credit/No Credit options: Auditing and Credit/No Credit options:** According to the 2009-2010 university bulletin, 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 30th day of the semester. So, if you decide to audit this class or desire the credit/no credit grade option, you must indicate this decision to me within the first 30 days of the semester. I cannot grant any grade-option changes past that time. *If you wish to apply this course to your general education requirements, you must take it for a traditional letter grade.*
- (8) **Unique Needs**
I and the University 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. Give me the letter and 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.

Course Calendar

Date	Topic	Important Reminders
Week 1 Mon 8/31 Wed 9/2 Fri 9/4	Course introduction What is "Health" and Why is Communication Important to it?	Do quiz 1 by class on Wed 9/2
Week 2 Mon --- Wed 9/9 Fri 9/11	Key terms and concepts for understanding research on health and communication	No meeting Monday 9/7 (Labor day) Do quiz 2 by class on Wed 9/9
Week 3 Mon 9/14 Wed 9/16 Fri 9/18	An overview of the health benefits of social relationships The Harvard Study of Adult Development overview	Do quiz 3 by class on Mon 9/14 Begin working on "Savoring Communication" assignment
Week 4 Mon 9/21 Wed 9/23 Fri 9/25	Social support, comforting, and advice-giving	Do quiz 4 by class on Mon 9/25
Week 5 Mon 9/28 Wed 9/30 Fri 10/2	Social support, comforting, and advice-giving cont. Exam 1: Friday 10/2	No quiz this week "Savoring Communication:" Due Wednesday, 9/30 Thurs 10/1: Last day to drop without petition, and to declare CR/NCR grade option.
Week 6 Mon 10/5 Wed 10/7 Fri 10/9	Humor	Do quiz 5 by class on Mon 10/5
Week 7 Mon 10/12 Wed 10/14 Fri 10/16	Affectionate communication	Do quiz 6 by class on Mon 10/12 Research component due: Friday 10/16
Week 8 Mon 10/19 Wed 10/21 Fri 10/23	Self-Disclosure	Do quiz 7 by class on Mon 10/19 Pre-registration advising week: Make appt. with your advisor
Week 9 Mon 10/26 Wed 10/28 Fri 10/30	Expressing gratitude, compassion, and kindness Exam 2: Friday 10/30	Do quiz 8 by class on Mon 10/26
Week 10 Mon 11/2 Wed 11/4 Fri 11/6	Emotional experience and expressions	Do quiz 9 by class on Mon 11/2
Week 11 Mon 11/9 Wed ---- Fri 11/13	Forgiveness	Do quiz 10 by class on Mon 11/9 No meeting Wed 11/11 (Veteran's day)
Week 12 Mon 11/16 Wed 11/18 Fri 11/20	Love and affection	Do quiz 11 by class on Mon 11/6

Week 13 Mon 11/23 Wed ---- Fri -----	Love and affection (Cont.)	No quiz this week No meeting 11/25 & 11/27 (Thanksgiving)
Week 14 Mon 11/30 Wed 12/2 Fri 12/4	Course project presentations	Presentation component due: Monday, 11/30
Week 15 Mon 12/7 Wed 12/9 Wed 12/11	Course project presentations Closing words on communication and health	
	Final Exam: 1:10-3:10 Tuesday, Dec. 15th	