

# **COM 280 – Introduction to Communication Studies**

(formerly, History of Rhetorical and Communication Theory)  
**Winter 2008 (WEC)**

**Instructor:** David Lapakko

**Office:** 178 Foss

**Office phone:** 612-330-1722 (has 24-hour voice mail)

**Home phone:** 612-866-3860 (between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m., please)

**Office hours:** WEC Fridays, 5:00-5:45 (or by appointment)

**Internet:** [lapakko@augsborg.edu](mailto:lapakko@augsborg.edu)

**Please note that this class meets from 6-10 pm on the following Friday nights:  
January 11, January 25, February 1, February 15, February 29, March 14, and March 28.**

## **GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION**

COM 280 is a “liberal arts foundation” (LAF) course in the general education program, designed to acquaint you with the world of ideas that is the foundation for the field of Communication Studies. Some of these ideas were developed over 2000 years ago; others have surfaced in the last few decades. Some of these ideas are qualitative in nature; others are derived from quantitative research. Some of these ideas are fairly simple to grasp; others are more abstract and technical. But overall, the focus of this course is on the “intellectual foundations” of communication study. Oooh—ideas, theories, intellectual foundations--does this mean it is irrelevant to your everyday life? That is has no practical value? Not really. Sharp people with good analytical skills (people like you, no doubt!) should be able to see the connection between “theory” and “practice” in a variety of ways, and I will be stressing these connections as well. Also, should you decide to major or minor in Communication Studies, you will find this course helpful as a springboard to other courses in the department. Although the course by no means deals with every foundational theory in the field, it covers a good chunk of them.

## **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK**

Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2006). ISBN # 0-07-301018-9. Please note that this is the 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Also, be sure to check [www.mhhe.com/griffin6](http://www.mhhe.com/griffin6), which is a website that can be helpful to you in a variety of ways. This website includes chapter summaries, sample exam questions, and links to other resources discussed in each chapter.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Since WEC courses meet only seven times now in the winter term, my expectation is that you won't miss any classes—certainly no more than one. Although there are no formal penalties for attendance, I will consider attendance as a grading criterion. As an absolute minimum expectation, I do want to make it clear that you cannot expect to receive credit for the course if you miss three or more classes, even if you do all of the work. Also, the "lecture" material for this course will generally not be a simple repetition of what is in the text; therefore, if you miss any classes, it is your responsibility to get the notes for them.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS / MISSED EXAMS**

If you miss an exam, it is your burden to demonstrate that the reason for your absence was legitimate and compelling. If you do happen to miss an exam, it is your responsibility to make alternate arrangements—I **really do not want to have to “track you down.”** As for late assignments, all late work will be penalized, with the penalty to be determined by the particular circumstances. (I prefer to

have some latitude here; I think it's in everyone's best interests.) It is also assumed and expected that you have read and understand the college's policies regarding **plagiarism**; see page 5 of this document for further details.

## **GRADING**

At the end of the term, I will add up your total points for the term and arrive at a grade using these criteria:

- (a) **percentage of total points**--90% being excellent, 80% being good, 70% being satisfactory;
- (b) **rank in class**--i.e., where you stand in relation to other students;
- (c) **college grade guidelines**, which state that a 4.0 means achieving "highest standards of excellence" and a 3.0 means "achieves above basic course standards";
- (d) any "**gaps**" in the distribution where it makes sense to draw a line; and
- (e) any "**intangibles**"--e.g., attendance, class participation, perceived competence.

I do not assume in advance that there have to be a particular number of any grade; that is, I do not assume a "bell curve" distribution. In general, though, my tendency is to be relatively generous on the "low end" of the grading scale and somewhat stingy on the "high end." I am also reluctant to give course credit if you do not turn everything in—you can't elect to do certain assignments and ignore others. I will try to keep you posted about grades as we go through the term. Do stop by if you are not sure where you stand regarding grades.

## **GRADED ACTIVITIES (details subject to slight modification)**

### **EXAMS (200 points)**

The three non-cumulative exams in this course will include a combination of true-false, multiple choice, and short answer questions. These exams will have a weight of 200 points, regardless of the actual number of questions. For example, if there are 180 points worth of questions on the three exams, and you get 144 correct (80 percent), your exam score for the term will be 160 (80 percent of 200).

#### **Exam #1 – February 1**

This exam will be based on:

- anything we do in class from January 11 – January 25
- chapters 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, and 24 in the text

#### **Exam #2 – February 29**

This exam will be based on:

- anything we do in class from February 1 – February 15
- chapters 4 – 13 in the text

#### **Exam #3 – March 28**

This exam will be based on:

- anything we do in class from February 29 – March 14
- chapters 25 – 35 in the text, **plus the online chapter about Marshall McLuhan, which can be found at [www.afirstlook.com](http://www.afirstlook.com)**

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

For each exam, feel free to use one sides of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper as an aid—  
put whatever notes you want on this "cheat sheet."

### READING RESPONSES (60 points)

To encourage you to read the material for the course prior to the night before the exams, I'm assigning three "reading responses," each due the class meeting prior to each exam. These responses should be limited to three pages, double-spaced, and should include two or three comments (or observations or opinions) and at least one question related to the ideas in the readings. (Please avoid simply re-stating or re-summarizing what's in the text—you and I both know what's there; the goal is to "go further.") When you refer to something specific in the text, please cite specific page references so that I "know where you're coming from." Although I won't grade these too harshly (up to 20 points for each of the three responses), your comments must be of reasonable quality to receive the full 20 points.

Comments such as these will receive few or no points:

- I think the textbook has too many big words.
- I am confused about everything.
- I really like chapter 25 because it's interesting.

Questions such as these will receive few or no points:

- So when is the next exam?
- What are the most important ideas in chapter 12?
- How many questions will be on the next exam?

So, try to make your comments and questions fairly specific and thoughtful. What you submit ought to show some effort, an engagement with the material, a healthy curiosity, some critical thinking ability, and/or ability to see the relevance of the chapters to your own life or things you see happening in the "real world." Also, just so you know, I will choose some of these submissions to discuss in class but certainly not all—please do not take it too personally if we do not always discuss your submission. **PLEASE DO NOT EMAIL THESE RESPONSES (or either major paper)—HARD COPY, DELIVERED IN PERSON.**

Reading response #1 – due January 25

chapters 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, and 24

Reading response #2 – due February 15

chapters 4 – 13

Reading response #3 – due March 14

chapters 25 - 35

These due dates constitute the "reading assignments" for the term.

### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (120 points)

Twice this term I'd like you to complete a written project that is tied to the subject matter of this course. I am providing four options, described below—choose any TWO of the four.

Your first writing assignment is due **February 15.**

(60 points)

Your second writing assignment is due **March 28.**

(60 points)

For all of these options, please keep in mind that your goal is to develop something that seems informative, interesting, thoughtful, provocative, persuasive, creative, and analytically sound. There are many ways to execute these options well. Although I know that it's normal to ask the question, "What does he want?", I also want to encourage you to ask the question, "What do YOU want?" What can you bring to this paper that will make it worthwhile? To some extent, think of your task as finding a way to "sell" the reader on your approach; don't always obsess about some "recipe list" that you think the instructor has in the back of his mind to evaluate all aspects of your work; that's not exactly the case, although I'm sure you will learn to detect some of my "biases" about many things.

### **WRITING OPTION A - ANALYSIS OF A WELL-KNOWN SPEECH**

As a focus for this assignment, go to: [americanrhetoric.com](http://americanrhetoric.com). On this website, you will find a vast array of famous/noteworthy/important speeches that comprise our rhetorical history. Go to the part of the site that is titled "Top 100 Speeches." Choose one of these 100 speeches for your analysis. (However, one speech that you may **not** select is Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, partly because it's analyzed in your textbook at some length, and partly because it's almost too well-known.) Read and/or listen to the speech (many of them are viewable via Windows Media). Then, write a 5-page analysis (double-spaced) of this speech, using course concepts and other information to inform your analysis. Pay particular attention to chapters 22-24 in the text, along with what we discuss in class and any "outside reading" that you choose to do. Please keep in mind that this option will likely involve a little additional "research." For example, you may need to find out more about the speaker, the issues being discussed, the historical period, or the persuasive strategies being employed. You are expected to be "inquisitive and independent"—don't settle for what you already think and already know. Cite specific quotations from the speech to support and clarify the points that you make, and please attach the text of the speech to the back of the paper so that I know what you are responding to.

### **WRITING OPTION B - JOURNAL ARTICLE REPORT/CRITIQUE**

If you choose this option, go to the library and browse through our communication journals, including the Quarterly Journal of Speech, Communication Monographs, Communication Studies, Communication Quarterly, Southern Communication Journal, Journal of Applied Communication Studies, Critical Studies of Mass Communication, and Western Journal of Communication. **Once you have chosen an article, you must show me the citation and clear it with me; I need to make sure that you have selected an appropriate article.** Then, take the article and explain to the reader in **plain English** what this article has to say (about 2 pages, double-spaced). Then, "do something" with the article (about 3 pages). Critique it. Relate it to course concepts. Show any possible applications of this information. (If it's a research study, please keep chapter 1 of your text in mind.) A "good" paper will clearly summarize the article and help the reader see its strengths, weaknesses, and connections to other ideas. Also, be sure to attach a copy of the actual article to the back of the paper so that I know what you are responding to. As with all of these writing options, you probably will have to do some additional reading or research to fully understand the article; I expect a reasonable effort in that regard.

### **WRITING OPTION C - CAREERS AND COMMUNICATION THEORY**

On the first night of class, I will distribute a list of career fields that are connected to communication studies. Take any ONE of these fields (e.g., advertising, health care) and explain in specific terms how the ideas you are studying this term may relate to the field. (For example, what would be the implications of cognitive dissonance theory for people who work in advertising?) A variety of such connections will be considered a plus, although it's not a "contest" to see how many course terms you can fit in. But the idea is to demonstrate in about 5 double-spaced pages that these abstract ideas really do have specific implications for how one might communicate in a particular career field. Again, it's

assumed and expected that you will do some "outside reading" to "deepen" your analysis. Also, it is certainly acceptable, and potentially useful, to **interview** someone who works in that particular career field, and to use their comments as one part of your discussion.

### **WRITING OPTION D – EXTENDED DISCUSSION OF A SPECIFIC THEORY**

So, you've developed an interest in, say, "relational dialectics theory" (chapter 11 of the text). What more is there to know and to learn about this theory? The goal of this assignment would be to "go beyond" what we already know about the theory and expand our awareness and understanding of it. What have other critics had to say about this theory? What research has been done which relates to this theory? What does your textbook NOT say about this theory? And, is Griffin correct and accurate in his explanation and analysis of the theory? (You may, for example, want to read some things from the theorist "in the original"--in their own words, from "primary" sources. Any or all of these questions are appropriate, **as long as** you tell the reader something that can't be found in your text. Again, 5 double-spaced pages.

**FOR ALL WRITING OPTIONS:** You should be sure to cite sources when you are either (a) providing information that is not "common knowledge," and/or (b) using the exact language of another published source. Failing to give proper credit to such sources is plagiarism and constitutes academic misconduct—in some cases, the sort of misconduct that I would be obligated to report to the Dean's Office, and in most cases, the sort of misconduct that would result in either failing the assignment or failing the course. Providing only a list of sources at the end of your paper is insufficient—instead, you must provide "in-text" source citations. That is, at the exact point in the paper where you are borrowing from someone else, you need to so indicate, at that point. Such references can be in the form of footnotes (this is what the Griffin text uses), or by means of APA source references (in which the source is cited in parentheses—check the on-line APA style book if you need more information). In general, I am not obsessed about minor deviations in form, as long as I sense that you are making an earnest effort to provide credit to another source where credit is due.

**ALSO FOR ALL WRITTEN WORK: A "zero-tolerance" policy for spelling errors.** As a member of the Department of Communication Studies, where "presentation of self" is an important focus, I am concerned about your credibility. As a result, I am absolutely committed to the idea that you should never have spelling errors in any paper for any course, including this one. When you misspell words, people will judge you, even if they should not. They will draw conclusions about your effort, your attention to detail, your competence, and your intelligence. Therefore, for both major papers, I will automatically deduct **FIVE** points from your total if there are two or more spelling errors, and I will automatically deduct **TEN** points if there are four or more different words misspelled. For your "reading response" assignments, I will automatically deduct **THREE** points if there are two or more spelling errors. So, check your spelling carefully. Do not totally trust any computerized "spell check" programs. Let me be very clear: I simply will not let you make a bad impression in writing that relates to spelling.

### **OTHER COMMENTS**

- **There are no "study guides" that will be provided in class**, simply because the McGraw-Hill website for your text ([www.mhhe.com/griffin6](http://www.mhhe.com/griffin6)) provides all you need to know, and more, about each chapter. There are chapter summaries, sample exam questions, web links of various sorts, and even crossword puzzles for each chapter—be sure to check out this website, sooner than later. It can be immensely helpful to you.

- **Please note that it's expected that you will keep a copy of the papers you turn in.** Not that I lose or misplace these things on a regular basis, but I want to avoid any possible "I turned it in—no you didn't" scenarios!

- **As mentioned above, please do not send me writing assignments via email.** You may think that sending papers electronically is easy, and it usually is—for YOU. But for ME, it means keeping track of multiple papers (you're not the only one in my classes); being able to download them (often not a problem, but sometimes a real headache that can chew up 30 or 40 minutes of time); and needing to print, collate, and staple them (often on my own personal printer, with my ink and my paper). As a writer, you are trying to make it easy for the reader, not more difficult.

- **I also expect that you will, on your own initiative, see me if you are confused, angry, frustrated, or having any other sorts of problems.** That's part of becoming a responsible adult, and it's as important as any other lessons you might learn in college. I really don't see myself as a scary or punishing person, and I need to know what's going on with you, for your sake and mine. (If nothing else, send me an email note, where you can pretend that I'm a dog or something!)

- **All "LAF" courses in humanities are supposed to include this language in the syllabus, and so I include it here for you to consider:**

"This course fulfills a Liberal Arts Foundation requirement in the Humanities. Augsburg's Humanities departments and programs are Communication Studies, English, History, Modern Languages, Philosophy, Religion, American Indian Studies and Women's Studies. These eight disciplines engage human experience from different perspectives using different modes of discourse, but they share a common goal of rigorous inquiry into the ways written and spoken language can record, discover, and creatively express the truths of human experience. In this Humanities Liberal Arts Foundation class you will explore some of the range and possibilities of that experience.

"Depending on the course you take you may investigate our diversity of human nature and culture, our forms of communication and persuasion, our powers of reason, sympathy, and imagination, our needs as individuals and roles as citizens, and our relationship to the beautiful, the transcendent, and the divine. As the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has written, Humanities courses help students use reason and imagination to enter broader worlds of cultures, groups, and ideas."

## **SUMMARY OF COURSE DUE DATES**

January 11	
January 25	reading response #1 due
February 1	exam #1
February 15	reading response #2 due; paper #1 due
February 29	exam #2
March 14	reading response #3 due
March 28	exam #3; paper #2 due

**FOR THE FIRST CLASS: no "assignment," but I strongly encourage you to purchase the textbook in advance, check out the website for the text, and at least skim or look through chapters 1-3 and 22-24 before 6:00 pm on January 11.**