



**COMM Communication Theory & Everyday Life**  
**Fall 2020**  
**Online**

**Instructor:** Dr. Natasha Seegert  
**Email:** [n.seegert@utah.edu](mailto:n.seegert@utah.edu) (Email is the best way to reach me—please use it!)  
**Office:** 2413 LNCO  
**Office Hours:** By appointment (email me to set up a meeting, I love meeting with students)  
**Teaching Assistants:** Sebastiaan Gorissen, [sebastiaan.gorissen@utah.edu](mailto:sebastiaan.gorissen@utah.edu)  
Trevor Smith, [trevorreddsmith@gmail.com](mailto:trevorreddsmith@gmail.com)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES**

This course, which serves as an introduction to the academic discipline of communication, is designed to furnish you with a basic understanding of the major theoretical perspectives that inform contemporary communication studies. Specifically, this course will assist you in developing a more thoughtful, sophisticated, and critical understanding of communication processes; allow you to apply that knowledge in the interpretation of a variety of communication situations, issues, and problems; and exercise and improve your analytical skills through brief written analyses as well as through active application of theories.

**Course Goals**

- To explore basic issues and perspectives in the study of communication
- To develop proficiency in the critical analysis of a variety of communicative forms and practices
- To understand the scope of communication as a field of study

**Student Learning Outcomes**

- Students should demonstrate their abilities to think critically using written academic argument, analysis, critique, and evaluation.
- Students should be able to analyze and interpret texts and case studies by applying the concepts, questions, and theoretical paradigms discussed in class and in the assigned readings.
- Students should be able to formulate illuminating and persuasive claims in their writing, projects, and exam responses. These ideas should reflect a solid internalization of the course material.
- Students should be able to use textual evidence (via quotation, analysis, and documentation of pertinent passages) to ground their arguments and back up their claims.
- Students should be able to express their ideas in clear, logical, organized, concise, and persuasive ways, in both written and oral forms.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

The assignments for this course are not excessive, but you will need to devote a great deal of time to the course **EVERY DAY**. To keep from falling behind, plan to **read, write, and/or view films every day**

**Books**

Griffin, E. (2014). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw- Hill.

This book is available through Inclusive Access which you can opt out of: <https://portal.verba.io/utah/login>

## Films

Most of these films will be available to view streaming for free through the Marriott Library's Streaming Services. In some instances, you will need to rent it for a small fee via a streaming service like Amazon.

### Currently Assigned Films (additional films may be added)

- "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror*, Season 3, Episode 1, directed by Joe Wright (available through Netflix)
- *Good Night and Good Luck*, directed by George Clooney (available to rent through Amazon, iTunes, Vudu, or Google Play)
- *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, directed by Marielle Heller
- *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve
- *Twelve Angry Men*, directed by William Friedkin (1997 version)
- *Experimenter*, directed by Michael Almereyda
- "Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos" from *Frontline*, Season 38, Episode 2
- *The Mask You Live In*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom
- *Killing Us Softly 4*, directed by Jean Kilbourne
- *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele

## ONLINE COURSE FORMAT

- All coursework will be **online and asynchronous**.
- All times are for **Mountain Standard Time**.
- This course will function off a **Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule** for the posting of all lectures, assignments, and assignment submissions.
- **Typed lectures will be posted one week in advance** each Monday by 12:00 PM (noon).
  - Lectures will supplement the textbook content and will serve to nuance some concepts, expand on others, and demonstrate the application of the theory to media. Students must read and demonstrate knowledge of textbook content.
- **Assignments will be due on Wednesdays and Fridays by 2:00 PM, MST**. A 9-hour & 59-minute grace period will be provided until 11:59 PM. No extensions will be offered beyond that grace period.
- **Advanced feedback on assignments** can be provided by your Teaching Assistant. You must email your TA 48 hours prior to the assignment deadline, excluding weekends and holidays.
- **Assignments will be graded within two weeks** of the submission deadline.
- **Have a question?** Post it to the Course Forum or email me at the email address listed at the top of the syllabus. I may take up to 48 hours to respond to your email (excluding holidays and weekends). In your email, do the following: include an informative subject line, include a salutation that includes my name and title (e.g. Dear Professor Seegert), include your own name at the end of the email, and proofread your email.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Syllabus Quiz (1.5 points)**. The syllabus quiz must be completed with a perfect score to progress in the course. You will be given multiple chances to take the syllabus quiz.
- **Introductory Post (3 points)**. The Introductory Post must be completed to progress in the course.
- **Weekly Schedule (1.5 points)**. To be successful in online courses, you need a regular schedule to keep you on track. You will be required to submit a weekly schedule. This must be completed to progress in the course.
- **Student Survey (1 point)**. So your professor and TAs can best understand your interests and obligations, all students will be required to complete a brief survey. This must be completed to progress in the course.
- **Quizzes (10 points)**. Each week you will complete a short, online quiz that addresses materials discussed in previous class lectures. Quizzes will be matching, multiple choice, and fill in the blank.. Quizzes CANNOT be made up. *12 possible quizzes, 1 point each, the lowest two scores will be dropped.*
- **Media Application (15 points)**. Each week you will post to a discussion thread something you found in the

media – an image, a podcast, an article, a video – that is an example of a term we have discussed in the previous week’s lecture. For each media example you post, you will provide a brief explanation – 50-100 words – of the term that is at work in the example, a brief definition of the term, and how it applies to your example. You will also be required to “like” three posts of your peers, but you will not be required to comment on their posts. *12 possible posts, 1.5 points each, the lowest two scores will be dropped.*

- **Theory Discussion Posts (15 points).** Once a week on odd numbered weeks (i.e. Week 3, Week 5, etc.), you will be required to post a critical response – 150-300 words – to an online discussion forum engaging with specific questions I ask about the assigned materials. You will also be required to respond – 50-125 words – to the postings of two other students. You will not be able to see your peers’ postings prior to your own posting. *6 responses possible, 3 points each, the lowest one score will be dropped.*
- **Theory Reflections (15 points).** Once a week on even numbered weeks (i.e. Week 2, Week 4, Week 6, etc.) you will submit a reflection –350-500 words – regarding the application of a theory to your own life. Submissions must be made using MS Word. *6 responses possible, 3 points each, the lowest one score will be dropped.*
- **Paper (18 points).** Responding to a specific prompt, you will be required to analyze and apply a communication theory discussed in class to a specific scenario. Each paper is 1200-1500 words in length (4-6 pages). Full details will be posted on Canvas regarding question options, required outside citations, and formatting requirements. This paper will require both peer reviews, and revisions based on feedback provided by your TAs to receive full credit.
- **Theory Wiki Page (17 points).** A final project will require you to select a theory that has not been covered in the course, and to create a “wiki page” for it. Your Wiki page will have different sections regarding the major tenets of the theory, profiles on scholars who advance the theory, its application in popular culture, and its applicability to everyday contexts. Full details will be posted on Canvas. This project requires peer evaluations.
- **Mid-Term Exam (20 points).** The mid-term exam will be fill-in-the blank, matching, and multiple choice on terms, concepts, and texts/case studies/films read or discussed in class during the first half of the semester. *Mid-term will be timed on Canvas and available to take for three days. Once started, the exam must be completed.*
- **Final Exam (30 points).** The final exam will be fill-in-the blank, matching, and multiple choice on terms, concepts, and texts/case studies/films read or discussed in class during the entirety of the semester. *Final exam will be timed on Canvas and available to take for three days. Once started, the exam must be completed.*
- **Course Reflection (3 points).** A final course reflection – 350-600 words – will require you to consider what you have learned throughout the course of the semester and apply it to your everyday life.

### **Course Assignment Values – 150 points possible**

Syllabus Quiz:	1.5 points
Introductory Post:	3 points
Weekly Schedule:	1.5 points
Student Survey:	1 point
Quizzes:	10 points
Media Applications:	15 points
Theory Discussions:	15 points
Theory Reflections:	15 points
Paper:	18 points
Theory Wiki Page:	17 points
Mid-Term Exam:	20 points
Final Exam:	30 points
Course Reflection:	3 points

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### **Letter Grade Values (Do not ask me to “round-up” your grade. I won’t.)**

94-100 A	87-89.9 B+	77-79.9 C+	67-69.9 D+	00-59.9 E
90-93.9 A-	84-86.9 B	74-76.9 C	64-66.9 D	
	80-83.9 B-	70-73.9 C-	60-63.9 D-	

### **COURSE POLICIES**

- **Course Civility.** Communication allows us to engage with others and broaden our perspectives. How we talk about concepts together, in the physical or virtual classroom, is part of that process. Our diverse identities and experiences will inform and enhance those discussions. As we approach sometimes difficult topics, each member of the class is expected to foster a respectful, generous, and supportive online environment that makes room for productive difference and reasoned debate. Because this class centers on critical responses to cultural texts, spirited discussion (and even outright disagreement) is encouraged. However, incivility is a different story entirely. Here is the basic netiquette that will be expected in the course:
  - Always address your classmates by name. There is a human being on the other side of the screen who also has struggles, doubts, and bad days.
  - Disagreement is encouraged! Approach differences in a manner that seeks clarity and better understanding by asking productive questions and by providing counterarguments that are supported with evidence and not simply with feelings.
  - Anytime you have a strong emotional reaction to something, pause before responding. Emotions can be deceptive and can be regretted if acted on too hastily. Instead, always seek to provide an argument that is supported by credible evidence based on the theories we discuss in this course.
- **Due Dates & Submission Procedures.** Assignments are due as indicated on Canvas. No late work will be evaluated unless you clear this with me *beforehand* (this is something which I will only clear for **very** good reasons such as medical emergencies). Please submit all assignments to me **electronically**. Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx) is required for submitting papers electronically. Please adhere to style and citation formats outlined on assignment sheets – failure to do so will result in a loss of points.
- **Email.** Please email me at the email address listed at the top of the syllabus. Be aware that I may take up to 48 hours to respond to your email (excluding holidays and weekends). In your email, do the following: include an informative subject line, include a salutation that includes my name and title (e.g. Dear Professor Seegert), include your own name at the end of the email, and proofread your email.
- **Extra Credit.** I rarely offer extra credit. However, COVID changes things. If you make an appointment to meet with me via Zoom, I will give you 2 points of extra credit.

## CAMPUS POLICIES

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act.** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Access, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Access.
- **Campus Safety.** The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit [safeu.utah.edu](http://safeu.utah.edu).
- **Addressing Sexual Misconduct.** Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park

Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS). **As an employee of the University of Utah, I am a mandatory reporter for all cases of sexual violence** (this includes reports of cases that happened out-of-state, occurred many years ago, or have already been prosecuted).

- **Student Wellness.** Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness at [www.wellness.utah.edu](http://www.wellness.utah.edu) or 801-581-7776.
- **Incompletes.** Per University Policy 6-100 (III), section G, Incompletes are only offered under extraordinary circumstances and if the student has completed 80% of the coursework.
- **Course Withdrawals.** See this semester's *Class Schedule* for deadlines and procedures.
- **Academic Dishonesty.** Academic Dishonesty can take multiple forms. Plagiarism consists of using the work of someone else and passing it off as your own. Even if you plagiarize by accident you will still be held accountable. Other forms of academic dishonesty include signing in for someone else on the attendance sheet, having someone else complete your assignments, or cheating on an exam. *If you are having trouble with this course, contact me! Academic dishonesty is not the answer and the penalty can involve failure of the course.*
- **Curriculum Accommodations.**
  - I am able to make **schedule accommodations** for those who have a conflict that involves religious/spiritual observances, or University sanctioned activities (see University Policy 6-100 (III), section O). If you anticipate any scheduling conflicts with this course, please email me as soon as possible. It is the student's responsibility to contact me and it must be done through email.
  - I do not make **content accommodations** for course required materials (see University Policy 6-100 (III), section Q). Students may encounter reading materials, presentations, lectures, or audio/visual materials controversial or in conflict with their values or beliefs. Please be assured that all course content has been selected for its pedagogical value and utility in relation to the concepts we are engaging. **I will NOT make content accommodations** for this material. It is your responsibility to review the syllabus, readings, assignments, and materials in advance to be sure that this is a course you wish to take. Should you have questions, contact me immediately.

#### **Note on Potentially Offensive Course Material (!)**

Scholarly engagement with cultural texts (which might include R-rated films, mature video clips, irreverent cultural critiques, etc.) often involves encountering material from outside an individual's philosophical, religious, political, or personal comfort zones. **Please be advised that this course may contain such material.** Such material may include—but is not limited to—obscenity, profanity, representations of sexuality, violence, religion, anti-religion, politics, encounters with controversial issues in the media, etc. Students who feel that this may be a matter of concern should consult with the instructor *immediately after the first class session*. It is your responsibility to research required texts for potentially offensive materials.

#### **A Final Note for Students**

Successful students typically demonstrate a high degree of intellectual curiosity and critical interest, as well as an ability to respond to feedback. Please consider the online classroom as a community space in which we all share a scholarly adventure. I hope you already have, or will develop, a sense of responsibility to and respect for other students by sharing your thoughts, insights, and confusions. **Most important: I want you to do well in this course!** Please let me know how I can help.

Thanks! I look forward to working with you this semester!

~ Dr. Seegert – [n.seegert@utah.edu](mailto:n.seegert@utah.edu)

**SEMESTER OVERVIEW – Subject to Change**

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## WEEK 1

### Course Introduction

- Complete assignments listed on Canvas

## WEEK 2

### Introduction to Theory & Communication

- Griffin: Chapters 1-3

## WEEK 3

### Media Ecology

- Griffin: Chapter 25, Media Ecology
- Film: “Nosedive” from *Black Mirror*

## WEEK 4

### Cultivating Social Relationships Over Time

- Griffin: “Relationship Development” & Chapter 10, Social Information Processing Theory
- Griffin: Chapter 8, Social Penetration Theory

## WEEK 5

### Relational Dialectics

- Griffin: Chapter 11, Relational Dialectics
- Film: *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*

## WEEK 6

### Making Meaning

- Griffin: Chapter 5, Symbolic Interactionism
- Griffin: Chapter 6, Coordinated Management of Meaning
- Film: *Arrival*

## WEEK 7

### Elaboration Likelihood Model

- Griffin: “Influence” & Chapter 15, Elaboration Likelihood Model
- Film: *Twelve Angry Men*

## WEEK 8

### Work Week

- Paper 1 Submission
- Mid-term exam available October 13-15

## WEEK 9

### Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- Griffin: Chapter 16, Cognitive Dissonance Theory
- Film: *Experimenter*

## WEEK 10

### Agenda-Setting Theory

- Griffin: Chapter 30, Agenda Setting Theory
- Film: *Good Night & Good Luck*

## WEEK 11

## **Organizations & Work**

- Griffin: Chapter 19, **Cultural Approaches to Organizations**
- Griffin: Chapter 21, Critical Theory in Organizations
- Film: *Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos*

## **WEEK 12**

### **The Power of Words**

- Griffin: Chapter 22, Rhetoric
- Griffin: Chapter 24, Narrative Paradigm

## **WEEK 13**

### **Muted Group Theory**

- Griffin: Chapter 33, Muted Group Theory
- Film: *The Mask You Live In*
- Film: *Killing Us Softly 4*

## **WEEK 14**

### **Co-Cultural Theory**

- Griffin: Chapter 36, Co-Cultural Theory
- Film: *Get Out!*

## **WEEK 15**

### **Work Week**

- Wiki Page

## **WEEK 16 – FINAL EXAM**

Final Exam Available 12/07 - 12/10, only one attempt permitted and must be completed in 60 minutes.