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COMX 491.B01: "It Runs in the Family" - Health and Family

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COMMX 491: “It Runs in the Family”: Health & Family Fall 2020

Professor:	Heather L. Voorhees, Ph.D.
Where?	In-Person class either Tuesdays or Thursdays, 12:30 to 1:50 p.m., LA 337; second weekly assignment due before 5 p.m. the next Monday
Office:	LA (Eck Hall) 356
Office hours:	Wednesdays, 1-3 p.m. ONLINE ONLINE Zoom Link: https://umontana.zoom.us/j/99070011736 Password: HealthComm
E-mail:	heather.voorhees@umt.edu
Required texts:	All readings will be published on Moodle

Course Description & Objectives

This upper-level course examines the intersection of communication, family and health: How do families talk about health? How does health change how families communicate? How can communication impact individual family members’ health and health-related behavior? Further, how do we even define these terms (“family,” “communication” and “health”), in the first place, and what do they mean to different people?

Through carefully curated readings, in-class lecture, group discussion, application activities and a final project, this class will study the academic and “real-life” aspects of family communication about health. We will explore the relationships between communication, family and health, and examine how all three aspects affect—and are affected by—numerous factors, including age, gender, culture and socio-economic status. Then, we will focus on how health communication manifests within specific intra-familial relationships, including mother-daughter, grandparent-grandchild, and sibling connections. A special unit will explore how families communicate (or don’t) about mental health issues; another will discuss caregiving for older adults and end-of-life communication within families.

By the end of this course you will be:

- able to articulate how a family’s communication patterns and habits directly affect those family members’ health beliefs, health behavior, and overall physical and mental health.
- able to recognize communication patterns and theories in your own family, which will deepen your understanding of how families (including your own) operate.
- educated about how cultural differences shape families’ communication about health and wellness.
- proficient in reading and comprehending empirical research articles.
- more skilled in interviewing people, particularly about health-related topics.

How This Course Works

As a “blended” course, this class is taught half online, half in-person. This structure allows students more flexibility in their daily schedules, and helps students (and me!) follow recommended social distancing guidelines. This structure does not allow for students who simply want to “do half the work” of a regular, face-to-face course. The online portion of class is not optional, though it can be completed on your own time, anytime during the week.

Once a week, we will meet in-person. I will present a lecture, facilitate discussion, and lead as many activities as is possible under COVID-related social distancing guidelines. You will then engage somehow with that material—perhaps a quiz on the chapter you were asked to read, or a short reflection essay. For our second weekly class period, you will be responsible for watching an online lecture or reading an assigned article. You will then be asked to either a) take a short quiz on the material, or b) participate in an online small-group discussion about a topic related to that week’s class topic. Quizzes and discussion participation are worth points toward your final grade. Concepts from both the in-person and online class periods will be on the mid-term, and should be used in your writing assignments.

Course Requirements and Grading

The grading breakdown is as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Reading Quizzes	65 points (13 quizzes, 5 points each)
Online Participation	55 points (11 discussion prompts, 5 points each)
In-Class Attendance	30 points (6 random checks, 5 points each)
Application Activities	60 points (2 essays, 30 points each)
Mid-Term Exam	65 points
Final Project	100 points
TOTAL	375 points

Grades will be based on the following scale:

- A= EXCELLENT. Greatly exceeds requirements. Shows outstanding levels of creativity, skill, initiative, and/or effort
- B= GOOD. Exceeds requirements. Shows substantial creativity, skills, initiative, and/or effort
- C= AVERAGE. Meets the requirements in every respect, but does not exceed requirements
- D= BELOW AVERAGE. Meets some requirements, but deficient in others
- F= POOR. Deficient in most or all requirements

A+	98-100%	C	73-77%
A	93-97%	C-	70-72%
A-	90-92%	D+	68-69%
B+	88-89%	D	63-67%
B	83-87%	D-	60-62%
B-	80-82%	F	59% and below
C+	78-79%		

Assignment Descriptions

Reading Quizzes (60 points)

Every week, you will be assigned a short (5 questions each) reading quiz on that week's assigned reading material, to ensure that you are engaging in active learning and critical thinking about course concepts. Quizzes will be timed, and any answers not completed within the time limit will receive 0 points. Each quiz is worth up to 5 points. You may NOT make up reading quizzes (except for excused absences).

Online Participation (40 points)

In addition to attending in-person class, each week, you will be assigned a piece of media to read or watch (a podcast, an academic article, a video, etc.). You will then be asked to engage with the material via a quiz, a short reflection essay, or a small-group discussion forum (3 or 4 students). These prompts will directly relate to the material you were asked to read/watch for that week's online class session. Each assignment—no matter what type—is worth up to 5 points.

These are GRADED ASSIGNMENTS, meaning you can't just half-ass them and expect to get the full 5 points. If you are asked to write a reflection essay, I require 5 or 6 sentences that are meaningful, coherent, and written at a college level. If you are asked to post something in an online forum, your words must be substantial and thoughtful, not just "Loved the article, it was great!"

In-Class Attendance (30 points)

Six times randomly throughout the semester, I will take attendance during our in-class session. If you are present, you will receive 5 points—easy as that.

There is a chance that COVID may cancel our in-person class sessions at some point during this semester. If that happens, we will shift to synchronous online class periods, and my random attendance checks will apply. Zoom keeps track of who is present, when you log on, and when you leave; if you arrive no later than 5 minutes after the start of class and leave no sooner than 5 minutes before the end of class, you will receive attendance points.

Application Activities and Reflection Essays (60 points)

This class includes three in-class application activities, two of which will require preparation outside of class. Activities include:

- Activity 1: From parents telling a child to "Drink your milk so you grow up big and strong," to a grandparent sneaking their grandchild a puff of a cigar, our family teaches us what behavior is "healthy" and what actions are "unhealthy." Interview either your parent, legal guardian, grandparent, or other important adult in your life about how THEIR parents taught them healthy behavior, and how their family discussed health, in general. If the person you interview has children, ask them what lessons THEY passed on (either consciously or unconsciously) to their kids, and how they encourage healthy behavior within their immediate family. We will discuss the interviews in small groups in class.
 - Reflection Essay 1: Based on the interview in Activity 1, write a 5-page reflection about the differences and similarities in health-related, intra-family communication when comparing your friend/acquaintance and your older relative/adult. How are family communication norms impacted by factors such as generational differences, race/ethnicity, age, religion, culture, socioeconomic status, and genetic history of illness? (30 points)
- Activity 2: No Letting Go. We will watch the feature-length film [No Letting Go](#) over two class periods. The award-winning film follows a family recognizing and dealing with the mental illness

of a teenage son, and describes the emotional, logistical and communicative tightropes that families walk when facing a loved one's debilitating anxiety and depression.

- Reflection Essay 2: Write a 4-page essay relating concepts and moments from No Letting Go to concepts and theories we have covered in class. Specific writing prompts to follow. (30 points)

Mid-Term Exam (60 points)

There will be one exam in this class, at mid-terms. The exam will include a variety of question formats, including multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank and short-answer/short-essay, covering major concepts and terms we've discussed in class. No notes will be allowed, and the exam must be finished within the usual class time period.

Final Project (100 points)

Instead of a final exam, you will create and present a project that demonstrates your understanding of the course material, as well as strengthens your research and research-writing skills. You have two options:

Option 1: Choose a health topic (example: "equal access to healthcare" or "Western versus 'alternative' medicine") or a specific diagnosis (example: diabetes or cancer) and write an academic paper about how family communication impacts an individual's opinions about, and behavior around, your topic – or vice versa (how the topic influences family communication). Conduct a systematic literature review of published research studies that address your topic, and use them to support your opinions. Also feel free to include personal experiences and/or interviews with content experts. Your paper should be formally written, and should address basic question such as: a) why is this topic relevant? b) how has communication or opinions about this topic changed over the past decade or century? c) How can families do a better job talking about this topic? Your paper will briefly review the results of at least 5 of the articles you found (i.e. what kind of study was conducted, what the researchers learned, what limitations they faced, what was unique about their study, etc.) Your paper should conclude with at least one recommendation for further research.

Option 2: Focus on a specific health issue (examples: "healthy eating," "cancer prevention," or "active lifestyles") and create an intervention that helps families talk about that particular topic effectively and respectfully. Your intervention could be any sort of multi-faceted tool or resource that a family could easily use: a discussion and activity guide, the framework for a website, the outline of a free workshop, etc. For this project, you don't necessarily need to create the tool, but write the plan for tool – what it will contain, how it will be organized, and what participants can expect to learn or achieve. The intervention must be based in at least one theory we've learned throughout the semester, and your explanation of the intervention must cite at least 5 academic articles. If you are drawn to this option, we will discuss specific ideas and parameters before you are given permission to proceed.

Either option will include an 8-page paper (not including your Reference list), and a short (5-minute) presentation during Finals Week.

TENTATIVE SEMESTER SCHEDULE
 (This is subject to change—be watching Moodle regularly.)

Week 1 (Aug. 19-21): What is Health? What is Communication?		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
ONLINE LESSON FOR EVERYONE	Intro to Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <u>Watch</u> the video lecture (an introduction to class) □ <u>Fill out</u> student information sheet online □ <u>Post</u> a message in your small-group, online discussion forum.

Week 2 (Aug. 24-28): Foundational Theories of Family and Health		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	What is Communication? What is Health? What is Family?	<u>Attend Class</u> <u>Post</u> a small-group forum discussion
Online	Family Communication Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <u>Read</u>: Communication Patterns and the Creation of Family Identity □ <u>Reading Quiz</u> (5 points)

Week 3 (Aug. 31-Sept. 4): How do Family Dynamics Relate to Health?		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	How Family Communication Dynamics Impact Well-Being	<u>Read</u> : Family Communication and Well-Being, Carma Bylund
Online	How Family Members Impact One's Illness Experience	<u>Listen</u> : Podcast: Family Dynamics and Cancer

Week 4 (Sept. 7-11): Family Communication and Health Behavior		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	How Family Attitudes Influence Actions	<u>Read</u> : J. Lynne Brown (2011): "The Role of Couple Communication in Managing Type 2 Diabetes", Chap. 4 in Miller-Day book
Online	Application Activity 1	<u>Work on</u> Application Activity 1 (submit by 5 p.m. Monday, Sept. 14)

Week 5 (Sept. 14-18): Health Communication Within Marriages/Partnerships		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	First Comes Illness, Then Comes Marriage	<u>Watch</u> : Unrest
Online	First Comes Illness, Then Comes Marriage	<u>Read</u> : "In Sickness and in Health: Coping with Chronic Illness While Transitioning Into Marriage" Pettigrew & Pettigrew (2011)

Week 6 (Sept. 21-25): How Parents Talk to Children about Health		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Parent-Child Health Communication	<u>Read:</u> Alemán, M. W., & Helfrich, K. W. (2010). Inheriting the Narratives of Dementia: A Collaborative Tale of a Daughter and Mother.
Online	Parent-Child Health Communication	<u>Listen:</u> Invisibilia podcast, "The Fifth Vital Sign"

Week 7 (Sept. 28-Oct. 2): How Siblings Communicate about Health		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Adult Sibling Communication about Health	<u>Read:</u> Glowacki, E. (2017). Examining Sibling Communication About Problematic Drinking: An Application of Inconsistent Nurturing as Control Theory
Online	When One Sibling is Sick...	<u>Watch:</u> 60 Minutes Australia: Parents Conceive Baby for Bone Marrow Transplant for Sick Sibling

Week 8 (Oct. 5-9): Mid-Term		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	MID-TERM EXAM PREP	
Online		<u>View:</u> Online lecture: How to write a research paper

Week 9 (Oct. 12-16): Health Stigma And Families		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Parents Communicating About Stigmatized Issues	<u>Read:</u> Edwards, Donovan-Kicken & Reis (2014). Communicating in Complex Situations: A Normative Approach to HIV-Related Talk Among Parents who are HIV+. Journal of Health Communication
Online		TAKE MID-TERM EXAM

Week 10 (Oct. 19-23): Mental Health Communication Within Families		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Have Prepared Before Class:
In-Class Session	Talking About Trauma	<u>Read:</u> Lin, N. J., & Suyemoto, K. L. (2016). So You, My Children, Can Have a Better Life: A Cambodian American Perspective on the Phenomenology of Intergenerational Communication about Trauma. Journal Of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma
Online	Talking about Mental Health	<u>Listen:</u> Podcast, "Sincerely X: Mood Changer"

Week 11 (Oct. 26-30): Mental Health Communication Within Families (ctd.)		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Application Activity 2: In-Class Viewing of No Letting Go	
Online	Application Activity 2	Work on Application Activity 2 (due by 5 p.m. Monday, Nov. 2)

Week 12 (Nov. 2-6): Culture and Health Communication		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Cultural Differences Around Family Health Conversations	<u>Read:</u> Yamasaki, J., & Hovick, S. R., (2015) "That Was Grown Folks' Business": Narrative Reflection and Response in Older Adults' Family Health History Communication.
Online	Cultural Differences Around Family Health Conversations	<u>Watch:</u> Culture Matters: Indigenous Perspectives on Behavioral Health

Week 13 (Nov. 9-13): End-of-Life Communication within Families		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	In-Class Viewing and Discussion: Extremis	
Online	Family Roles In End-of-Life Situations	<u>Read:</u> Trees, A. R., Ohs, J. E., & Murray, M. C. (2017). Family Communication about End-of-Life Decisions and the Enactment of the Decision-Maker Role. Behavioral Sciences

Week 14 (Nov. 16-20): Finals Week!		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Assignment:
In-Class Session	Final Project Presentations!	Be ready to present your project
Online		Final class survey

Week 15 (Nov. 23-25): Finals Week!		
Where?	Topic Discussed/Activity:	Have Prepared Before Class:
Online		Complete: Final Class Survey All Final Projects Due Semester-End Reflection Papers Due

Expectations

As a student in a 400-level course, you are expected to:

- a. attend class and be engaged,
- b. complete assigned readings,
- c. complete all work by the assigned due date,
- d. locate, read and absorb scholarly sources, and
- e. critically reflect on course concepts.

There is no better way to prove you are learning than by fully participating in class and thoughtfully completing your assignments on time.

Late to class

Although there are undoubtedly times when circumstances may cause us to be late to class, please remember that tardiness is disruptive, so make it a point to arrive on time. If you know ahead of time you will be substantially late or will need to miss a class, give me a head's up as soon as you can.

COVID-related rules

We are living in interesting times, and a global pandemic requires special rules. Please make special note of the following requirements:

- Mask use is required within the classroom. If I have to wear one, you have to wear one. We're in this together.
- Each student is provided with a cleaning kit. The expectation is that students will clean their personal workspace when they arrive for class, and before they leave the classroom
- Classrooms may have one-way entrances / exits to minimize crowding. Please follow those guidelines.
- Please do not congregate outside the classroom before and after class.
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts. Don't move your seats.
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom (because it necessitates mask removal).
- Stay home if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. We also ask that you contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330 to report your symptoms.
- Up-to-Date COVID-19 Information from the University of Montana is available at the UM Coronavirus Website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus>
- UM COVID-19 Fall 2020 website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/fall2020.php>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Montana to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with Disability Services for Students, at dss@umontana.edu or (406) 243-2243.

Written Assignments

All papers are expected to reflect university-level writing quality: spelling, organizational, and grammatical errors will greatly reduce your final grade. The University's Writing and Public Speaking Center offers one-on-one assistance with written assignments and oral presentations, available on a drop-in or by-appointment basis. They can provide feedback on written assignments, as well as help develop strategies for re-writes. Information on these services can be found at www.umt.edu/writingcenter/.

Unless noted, submit all assignments via Moodle before class on the day they are due. Unless given explicit prior approval from me, assignments will lose 20% of total points possible for each day late, beginning the minute class starts on the due date.

Academic Integrity

As a student of the University of Montana, you must practice academic honesty and are bound by the following Code of Academic Conduct: <http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/student-code-of-conduct-2020-pdf>. Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating, and deliberate interference with the work of others. If I suspect you have conducted any of this behavior, we will first have a face-to-face conversation. If, after that conversation, I believe that you are guilty of the offense and/or if I have physical evidence, I may report the incident to the Plagiarism merits academic punishment, ranging from an F on the assignment or for the course, to suspension or expulsion from the University.

What is plagiarism?

All course work should be original and unique for this class (i.e., do not use work from other courses even if it is your own). Plagiarism includes quoting or paraphrasing from other sources without acknowledging/citing the source of your information or presenting quoted material as your own words. You must be very clear about attribution of sources and you must know how to cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to cite sources should consult a style manual guide, such as <https://owl.purdue.edu/>. If you have questions concerning what constitutes plagiarism, please discuss this with me. Not knowing the definition of plagiarism does not excuse you from the consequences. Plagiarism results in, at minimum, failure on the assignment, but can result in failure of the course and reporting to academic authorities at the university.

Late Work Policy

Work that is turned in past the announced deadline—without an approved, excused absence – will lose 20% of total points possible each 24-hour period it is late.

Office Hours

In “normal times,” I’d welcome you into my office frequently to ask questions, clarify concepts, talk about your current grade, express concerns or just chat. However, due to COVID restrictions, I’m unable to hold physical office hours. I will hold virtual office hours for at least 2 hours a week (days and times to be posted on Moodle). I encourage you to drop in for personalized help. If you want to discuss something confidential, I’m happy to set up a private online appointment.

You are also welcome to ask questions or seek feedback via email. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. If your question is complex, I may request a Zoom meeting with you to talk it through.