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### COMX 491.01: Special Topics - Health and Family Communication

Heather L. Voorhees

*University of Montana, Missoula*, [heather.voorhees@umontana.edu](mailto:heather.voorhees@umontana.edu)

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## COMM 491: Health & Family Communication

Fall 2021

**Professor:** Heather L. Voorhees, Ph.D.

**Class Meetings:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-1:50 p.m., Jeannette Rankin Hall, Room 205

**Required texts:** *Family Communication, Connections and Health Transitions*, edited by Michelle Miller-Day. (2010) ISBN-10: 1433110687.

**Office:** Eck Hall (Liberal Arts Building) #356

**Office hours:** Tuesdays, 2-4 p.m. or by appointment

**E-mail:** [heather.voorhees@umont.edu](mailto:heather.voorhees@umont.edu)

### 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? 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. Throughout the semester, we will tie health concepts and contexts (Alzheimer's, mental health, cancer, etc.) to prominent communication theories (Communication Accommodation Theory, Communication Privacy Management, etc.) to take an evidenced-based, structured look at specific situations.

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.
- skilled in interviewing people, particularly about health-related topics.
- able to identify and practice effective team leadership tactics.



### How This Course Works

We will meet in-person for class twice a week for lectures and activities that help you understand that week's reading material. Outside of class, you will be asked to take a weekly content quiz via Moodle; questions on these quizzes (and on the mid-term and final exam) will come from both your readings and in-class lectures. The content is not the same for each!

Each week, you will *also* be asked to complete an activity that relates to that week's material – this might be listening to and reflecting on a podcast, watching and writing something about a YouTube video, working in small groups in class, etc. Sometimes, we will complete these activities in class, and other times, you will be asked to complete them during non-class homework time. If we are completing that week's activity in class, I will let you know ahead of time; if you are absent that day, you will not be eligible to earn that activity's points.

Occasionally, and unannounced, throughout the semester, I will take attendance. Students who are present will earn 3 points. You will not be able to make up attendance, unless we have discussed an Excused Absence.

For online activities and content quizzes, the weekly deadline is **NOON SUNDAY.**

### Course Assignments and Grading

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Reading Quizzes	50 points (10 weekly quizzes, 5 points each; there are 11 quizzes throughout the semester, lowest score is dropped)
Weekly Activities	50 points (10 activities, 5 points each)
In-Class Attendance	15 points (5 random checks, 3 points each)
Application Activities	40 points (2 activities, 20 points each)
Mid-Term Exam	50 points
Second Exam	35 points
Final Project	50 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295 points</b>

Grades will be based on the following scale:

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



For final grades, I will round to the nearest full percentage point. For example, 84.71% will round up to 85%. 84.31% will round down to 84%.

### **Assignment Descriptions**

#### **Reading Quizzes (50 points)**

Every week, you will be assigned a short (5 questions each) reading quiz on that week's reading material and in-class content. Quizzes will be timed, and any answers not completed within the time limit will receive 0 points. Each quiz will count for 5 points. There will be 11 quizzes throughout the semester; your lowest score will be dropped. You may NOT make up reading quizzes (except for excused absences).

#### **Weekly Activities (50 points)**

In addition to weekly reading quizzes, you will also be asked to engage with class material via activities such as small-group discussions, podcast reflections, personal essays, etc. Each activity will be worth up to 5 points; points will be deducted if you do not follow instructions, or clearly "half-ass" the assignment. Some of these activities will be conducted online, while others will be completed in class – if you're not in class that day, you will not be eligible for those points.

#### **In-Class Attendance (15 points)**

Five times randomly throughout the semester, I will take attendance during our in-class session. If you are present, you will receive 3 points—easy as that.

#### **Application Activities (40 points)**

This class includes two application activities that will require work 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 4-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? (20 points)
- *Activity 2: Movie Analysis.* You will watch one of several family health-related movies (chosen from a list of eligible films I have created), then apply course concepts to a critical analysis of the movie's main points.
  - *Reflection Essay 2:* Write a 4-page essay relating concepts and moments from the film to concepts and theories we have covered in class. Specific writing prompts to follow. (20 points)

#### **Mid-Term Exam (50 points)**



This exam will cover material that we discuss through the first half of the semester. It will feature 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. The exam will be given IN-CLASS, and will be timed.

### **Second Exam (35 points)**

This exam will cover material that we discussed in the *second* half of the semester. Material from Exam 1 will NOT be on Exam 2. This exam will be similar in structure to Exam 1, but will be given ONLINE, via Moodle. You will have several days in which to take it, but your attempt will be timed once you begin, and you are allowed one attempt.

### **Final Project (50 points)**

To demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of family health communication, you will create and present a project that explores one of the following:

- Option A: 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 B: Focus on a specific health issue (examples: "healthy eating," "cancer prevention," or "active lifestyles") and design a tool or intervention that families could use to either improve their communication about, or their behavior around, that particular health issue. Get creative: maybe you want to design an interactive website, or plan a one-day workshop, or organize a special community event. The sky's the limit! To explain your intervention/tool, you will write a paper that explains: a) WHY this issue needs addressing, b) WHO is your target audience, and who can you partner with within the community to create or distribute your tool/intervention, c) WHAT your intervention actually is, and d) HOW the intervention will change families' beliefs or behaviors, or what it will specifically teach them. **If you are drawn to this option, we will discuss specific ideas and parameters before you are given permission to proceed.**

This project includes handing in a 6-page paper (not including your Reference list), and a short (5-minute) presentation during Finals Week. Specific parameters will follow.

### **Late Work Policy**

Work will only be accepted 24 hours after the due date. Work that is turned in even one minute after the announced deadline—without an approved, excused absence – will lose 20% of total points possible.



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.

### **Attendance**

I have no interest in forcing you to attend class regularly, nor can I “make” you come to class prepared—however, your overall grade will reflect your commitment to regular attendance, in-class participation and completion of out-of-class work. You get out what you put in. Thus, you are expected to attend each class and have assigned readings, preparations for activities, and any experiential exercises completed.

### **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.

### **Laptops in class**

I don’t mind the use of laptops to take notes or review readings, but don’t use it to check social media or study for other courses during class—nor should your cell phone should make an appearance during class. Being fully “present” in class will help you absorb the ideas better, and giving yourself a 75-minute break from your laptops and cell phones is beneficial to your brain, in general. *Hint:* Students who are obviously distracted by technology and not paying attention to class make easy targets for me to call on to explain course material.

### **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](mailto:dss@umontana.edu) or (406) 243-2243.

### **Don’t Cheat. Seriously.**

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/](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/).

### **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 department chair, and we may relay the incident to the Dean. From there, it could be turned over to the [Community Standards Team](#), who will open an investigation. *Potential outcomes include failing the assignment, failing the course, being suspended from school and/or being banned from graduation.*

### **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.

### **COVID-related stuff**

- Mask use is required within our classroom, and in all U of Montana classrooms and labs.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and [contact the Curry Health Center](#) at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress. Contact me ASAP so we can work out a solution.
- U of Montana, as well as Prof. Voorhees, recommends that students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to [Curry Health Center](#).
- To support contact tracing efforts, I will take attendance and record the daily seating arrangement.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.
- I may occasionally record class, to accommodate those who are quarantining. (The recordings will be uploaded to our Moodle page). I will let you know before each class period if it is being recorded.



### SEMESTER SCHEDULE (Key Dates)

*(This schedule is subject to change! Please check Moodle each week for final assignments and readings.)*

<b>Week 1 (Aug. 31 &amp; Sept. 2)</b>	Intro to Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come to class! Tues &amp; Thurs, 12:30-1:50</li> <li>• Post a welcome message on the Moodle forum (5 points)</li> <li>• Finish a quiz on Thursday's class material (5 points)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4 (Sept. 21 &amp; 23)</b>	Application Activity 1	App Activity 1 due midnight Sept. 27
<b>Week 8 (Oct. 19 &amp; 21)</b>	Mid-Term Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuesday: In-class exam review</li> <li>• Thursday: Take exam in class</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11 (Nov. 9 &amp; 11)</b>	Veteran's Day, Application Activity 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No Class</b> Thursday, Nov. 11</li> <li>• App. Activity 2 due by noon Nov. 15</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12 (Nov. 16 &amp; 18)</b>	Dr. Voorhees out of town at an academic conference	<b>No Class</b> Thursday, Nov. 18
<b>Week 13 (Nov. 23 &amp; 25)</b>	Thanksgiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuesday: In-class writing workshop (courtesy of The Writing Center)</li> <li>• Thursday: <b>No Class</b></li> </ul>
<b>Week 15 (Dec. 7 &amp; 9)</b>	Final Projects Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuesday: Presentations in class</li> <li>• Thursday: Presentations in class</li> </ul>
<b>Week 16 (Dec. 13-17)</b>	Finals Week	Take exam <i>On Moodle</i>