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COMM 485.01: Communication and Health

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COMM 485: Communication and Health
Spring 2013
CRN: 34985
LA 302

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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. The purpose of this course is to help you discover how human communication and interpersonal relationships intersect to affect our physical and psychological well-being. More broadly, 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 successful 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 available on e-res

Assignments

Communicating Kindness 100 points possible (50 each component)

Acts of kindness are behaviors that benefit other people or make others happy, usually at some cost on oneself (e.g., donating blood, helping a friend with a task, visiting an elderly neighbor or relative, or writing a thank you note to a former professor)” (Lyubomirski, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005, p. 125).

Recent research indicates that a bi-directional correlation exists between acts of kindness, a sense of well-being, and increased social acceptance (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2011; Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, and Lyubomirsky, 2012). In other words, people who do kind things for others are happier than those who do things only for themselves, and they are more well-liked by others. To carry it further, people who are happy and well-liked by others are also kinder.

This course will have two major written assignments. Both work together to help you understand how and why communication can correlate with health and well-being. The first part of the assignment involves practice – actually communicating kindness. The second component involves analyzing your communication and experience from a scholarly perspective.

The purpose of these assignments is to help you generate kindness in your life, and to understand the effects of doing so in a scholarly, informed way. Along the way, you’ll learn find and read scholarly research, analyze your and others’ communication from a scholarly perspective, and hopefully gain some personal benefits that research suggests go along with various ways of communicating kindness.

Below are the assignment instructions for each component. Notice that the first component (the Practice component) is due several weeks before the analysis component.

Communicating Kindness: Practice component

50 points possible

You will need to “do” this assignment before you actually write up the report for it, so be sure to plan time in the first few weeks of class for both practice and writing.

The first step is to pick a week during which you will actually practice communicating kindness. For this week, I’d like you to keep a diary of your feelings and observations about your sense of well-being over the course of seven days. Start with a Monday, and finish on a Sunday.

You have two general choices for how you engage in this activity. You can either (1) have a “Week of Kindness,” in which you choose five different act of kindness to enact each day for five days, or (2), have “a Day of Kindness,” in which you do five acts of kindness in one day. If you choose the Week of Kindness, you will earn greater benefits if your one act of kindness each day is effortful and significant, whereas the benefits of a day of kindness (five acts in one day) can be earned if they are significant, but relatively less effortful. Either way, you must do the acts before you write your report.

As you go about your week or day (regardless of which version you choose), I would like you to keep track of your feelings and observations *each day* for the full week. I recommend using a simple notebook or excel file, but if you’re ambitious and brave, you can get a mood-tracker app on your smartphone, web-browser, or other device (e.g., Moodpanda, Moody Me – see me first if you get one of these so we can talk about how it will work with this assignment). Whatever you use, I’d like you to record the following

information in the morning, afternoon, and night for seven days (Monday - Sunday) in the Morning (between 6am-noon), afternoon (noon-5pm), and evening (5pm-midnight):

On a scale of 0-10 (0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely)

- How happy you are right now, at this very moment?
- How sad you are right now, at this very moment?
- How alert you are right now, at this very moment?
- How tired you are right now, at this very moment?

If you are using a notebook or excel file, here's an example of what your diary might look like (Thanks to Sarah Tracy, Ph.D. for this example):

Day/date	Feeling	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Average	Notes
1/28/13 Monday	Happy	8	7	7	7.33	Got an unexpected gift in the mail today.
	Sad	3	5	2	3.33	Had a difficult course exam at 1pm
	Alert	1	5	4	3.33	Favorite coffee drink with a friend @ 2pm
	Tired	10	2	6	9.33	Stayed up too late studying last night.

Once your week is over, you can begin writing your report.

In your report, begin by describing what you think the best definition of “kindness” is. Then, summarize what you did to enact kindness. Did you choose a week of kindness or a day of kindness? Why did you make the choice you did? This introduction section should be about one-two paragraphs.

Then, describe your acts in chronological order. For each act, describe what you did, when it took place, what was happening before, and what happened after you did it, why you choose that act, how each act made you feel at the time, and how you feel right now as you think about that act. Be detailed in your descriptions. This part of your report should be around three pages.

Third, I'd like you to reflect on your mood tracker. What are the general trends in your feelings over the course of the week? For example, what day of the week was the happiest and most alert for you? On which day did you feel the most sadness, or the most exhaustion? Which mood did you tend to experience the most over the course of the week? What was going on in your life this week that seems to have had the strongest effect on your moods? Most importantly, what effects did your acts of kindness have on your moods? Are there some that made you feel differently than others? In general, what moods did kindness seem to affect most? This part of your report should be around two pages.

Finally, describe what you believe to be the meanings you created by your acts, for yourself or others. That is, what do you think your acts of kindness symbolized for yourself or others? What are the possible results that could come from your acts? This section could be around two pages.

In total, this paper could be around 6-9 pages of text, not including the APA style title page.

Communicating Kindness – Analysis component

50 points possible

Whereas the first paper was more informal and personal in character, this paper will be more academic in nature. The purpose of this assignment is to help you connect your acts of kindness to academic research findings that help explain why certain types of acts can influence or correlate with our health and well-being.

The first step in writing this paper is to reflect on your acts of kindness. For this assignment you'll need to determine one category of act that you engaged in, so that you can find adequate research on it. Here are some terms researchers use to describe some acts of kindness that you might have engaged in:

disclosure
altruism
social support
emotional support
instrumental support
affection
forgiveness

There are others – if you're having a difficult time figuring out what term your acts of kindness would fall under, just talk with me about it and we'll figure it out.

Once you've determined the best category label, I'd like you to locate six academic sources on that topic, specifically focusing on how the enactment of that kind of behavior relates to human health. Using those sources, I would like you to then write a paper with the following sections (format the subheadings in the same way that you see them here):

If you need assistance determining the definition of an academic source, please see the link on Moodle for "What is an academic source?" Alternatively, you can see me, and I'll explain it to you.

Introduction

Discuss the type of kindness that you are focusing on in this paper. Explain the example act(s) that you are working from (the act or set of acts that you actually did), and explain why it or they count as the type of communication that you have chosen for this paper (see the list above). Be sure to explain how researchers have defined this type of act in the body of research that you have collected.

What Research Teaches us About ____ (specify the type of act you're focusing on)

In this section, I would like you to make and support a claim about the effects that this type of act could have on human health. Using the research findings of the sources you find, try to convince me that the research findings teach us something novel or controversial about how this type of behavior could enhance one's well-being.

First, state your claim (the conclusion you want me to make) and give some general, possibly anecdotal reasons why I should believe it. Then, describe what research findings show about the general type of act that you are discussing. Organize your sources by order of persuasiveness; some research findings will be strong and direct evidence for your claim, and others might be more indirect and/or less persuasive. *Start by explaining the strongest evidence first*, and then discuss the other research findings that are less directly related, but still useful to include. If there are possible counter-arguments to

your claim (i.e., reasons to believe that it's not true), then use research findings to refute them. Finally, summarize the evidence and reasons why your conclusion should be believed.

Research and your Personal Experience

In this final section, I would like you to compare what the research shows about the type of act you engaged in with your personal experience. What are some ways in which research findings and conclusions overlap with your experience? What are some ways that the research findings contrast with your experience? If you were able to teach someone about the experience of communicating kindness in the future, what do believe would be the most important, useful recommendations you could give them? Explain your reasons for giving each of those recommendations.

I would estimate that between 6 and 9 pages is an appropriate length for this paper, although the grade will be based on the quality of writing and analysis of the six academic sources. APA formatting and source citations are expected.

Presentation - 25 points possible

After you've completed both of the above papers (the practice and analysis components), you'll develop a brief (5 minute) informative presentation that you give to the class. The purpose of the presentation is to provide me and your classmates with an overview of how you communicated kindness, and the effects that you found it to have, relative to what you've learned in class. The presentation should have an introduction, discussion, and conclusion, and be about your practice and analysis of communicating kindness. It should also include some visual artifacts (e.g., charts/graphs of your mood tracker, photos, letters, or other objects) that help illustrate your experience. The presentations will be evaluated on their articulateness, accurate discussion of course content, organization, and creativity.

Quizzes - 25 points possible

Most weeks I will assign a short quiz to appraise your awareness of the basic issues in the course readings, and to gather information useful to our class discussion.

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

Exams - 150 points possible (50 each exam)

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

Course Policies

1. Attendance and Participation

Because the course involves discussion of the readings each week, attendance is essential. I will take attendance *at least* six times in this class. Being absent during two of those times (i.e., one full week of the semester's worth of courses) will reduce your grade by one full letter. Missing four and six classes will reduce your grade by one and two additional letters respectively (thus, missing six classes would result in the highest possible grade being a "C.") You must let me know if you know ahead of time that you will be absent. In such an event, *your* responsibility is to find out what you missed and to get the lecture notes from one of your classmates. Once you review those notes, I encourage you to come speak with me about any questions you might have about the discussion you missed.

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.

2. Exam policy

The exams will be taken in class, and can be taken alone or collaboratively with one other person. For each exam, I will distribute an online survey that allows you to declare whether you wish to take the exam alone or collaboratively. If you choose to take the exam collaboratively, you may choose one partner to work with. Your partner must be declared in advance, and both partners must agree to take the exam with each other. You will be allowed to choose a specific partner, or ask me to assign you a partner.

You can choose the same format for each exam, or choose different formats or different partners.

3. Late Work

If you know that you will be missing a class, you should make an effort to submit your assignments early. 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.

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.

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.

All papers must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner.

5. **Academic Misconduct**

According to the University of Montana Catalog, “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**

According to the University Catalog, 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 major, minor, or 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. 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.

10. **A note about civility**

This is a professional setting, in which your success requires attention, engagement, and respect. I ask this because my success and your success in this class are interdependent, and I can only do my job if I have your attention and cooperation. Therefore, I reserve the right to impose a no-screen policy in this class if electronic communication devices are being used for non-class related activities. If you have personal issues to attend to during a specific class, it is acceptable to excuse yourself from class and return when you are ready.

Course Calendar

*Calendar is subject to change

Date	Topic	Important Reminders
Week 1 1/29 1/31	Course introduction What is "Health" and Why is Communication Important to it?	Begin planning/experiencing on "Communicating Kindness – practice component" assignment
Week 2 2/5 2/7	Key terms and concepts for understanding research on health and communication	Do quiz 1 by class on 2/5 Final week to withdraw without petition
Week 3 2/12 2/14	An overview of the health benefits of social relationships The Harvard Study of Adult Development overview	Do quiz 2 by class on 2/12
Week 4 2/19 2/21	Social support, comforting, and advice-giving	Do quiz 3 by class on 2/19 Final week to declare CR/NCR grade option.
Week 5 2/26 2/28	Social support, comforting, and advice-giving cont. Exam 1: 2/28	No quiz this week (Exam) Due: Communicating Kindness – Practice component
Week 6 3/5 3/7	Humor	Do quiz 4 by class on 3/5 Final week to withdraw with petition
Week 7 3/12 3/14	Affectionate communication	Do quiz 5 by class on 3/12
Week 8 3/19 3/21	Self-Disclosure	Do quiz 6 by class on 3/19
Week 9 3/26 3/28	Expressing gratitude, compassion, and kindness Exam 2: 3/28	No quiz this week (Exam) Pre-registration advising week: Make an appt. with your advisor
Week 10 4/2 4/4	Spring Break	
Week 11 4/9 4/11	Emotional experience and expressions	Do quiz 7 by class on 4/9 CK – analysis component due Fall pre-registration advising week

Week 12 4/16 4/18	Love and attachment	Do quiz 8 by class on 4/16
Week 13 4/23 4/25	Love and Attachment, continued. Forgiveness	Do quiz 9 by class on 4/23
Week 14 4/30 5/2	Closing words on communication and health Aging well	Schedule your presentation for next week.
Week 15 5/7 5/9	Course project presentations	
Final Exam: 8am – 10am Wednesday, May 15		

COMM 485: Communication and Health Course Readings

Week 1: Definitions of health and the importance of communication

(By Thursday) Gurung, R. (2006). Cultural approaches to health

Smith, E. E. (2013, January). There's more to life than being happy. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805/>.

Assess and reflect upon your current overall health using the World Health Organization's Quality of Life survey (on e-res or Moodle). What does the World Health Organization seem to define as "health" or "quality of life?" What are some reasons why you believe your health and quality of life are "good" or "bad"?

Week 2: Key terms and concepts for understanding research on health and communication

Kalat, J. W. (2004). Chapter 12.2: Stress and health

Brannon, L., & Feist, J. (2007). Chapter 2: Conducting health research

Week 3: An overview of the health benefits of social relationships

Seeman, T. (2001). How do others get under our skin? Social relationships and health. In C. D. Ryff and B. H. Singer (Eds.). *Emotion, social relationships, and health* (pp. 189-211). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Vaillant, Chapter 1 and Appendix A

Week 4: Social support, comforting, and advice-giving

Gurung, R. A. R. (2006). Chapter 5: Coping and social support.

Week 5: Social support continued + exam = No readings

Week 6: Humor

Lefcourt, H. M. (2005). Humor. In C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (Eds.). *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 619-631). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

Szabo, A. (2003). The acute effects of humor and exercise on mood and anxiety. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35, 1523-162.

Week 7: Affectionate communication

Bloom, M. V. (2005). Origins of healing: An evolutionary perspective of the healing process. *Families, Systems, and Health*, 23, 251-260.

Floyd, K., Boren, J. P., Hannawa, A. F., Hesse, C., McEwan, B., & Veksler, A. E. (2009). Kissing in marital and cohabiting relationships: Effects on blood lipids, stress, and relationship satisfaction. *Western Journal of Communication*, 73(2), 113-133.
doi:10.1080/10570310902856071

If you are interested in learning more about this topic:

Field, T. (2002). Infants' need for touch. *Human Development*, 45, 100-103

Week 8: Self Disclosure

Niederhoffer, K. G., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2005). Sharing one's story: On the benefits of writing or talking about emotional experience. In C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (Eds.). *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 573-583). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Tardy, C. H. (2000). Self-disclosure and health: Revisiting Sidney Jourard's hypothesis. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 111-123). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

If you are interested in other information on this topic:

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/Faculty/Pennebaker/Home2000/WritingandHealth.html>

Week 9: Expressing gratitude, compassion, and kindness

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377-389.

Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2012). Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in preadolescents boosts peer acceptance and well-being. *PLoSone*, 7(12), 1-3. Retrieved from www.plosone.org

Vaillant, Chapter 4

If you are interested in more information on this topic:

- <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/PWT/index.cfm>
- Brown, W. M., Consedine, N. S., & Magai, C. (2005). Altruism relates to health in an ethnically diverse sample of older adults. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 60B, 143-152.

Week 10: Emotional experience and expressions

Fredrickson, B. L., (2004). The broaden and build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 359, 1367-1377.

Vaillant, Chapter 2, pp. 60-82.

If you are interested in more information on this topic:

<http://www.positivityratio.com/>

Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic Happiness*. Free Press.

Week 11: Spring Break

Week 12: Love and attachment

Hendrick, S., & Hendrick, C. (2005). Love. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.). *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (472-484). New York: Oxford.

Moore, S. & Leung, C. (2002). Young people's romantic attachment styles and their associations with well-being. *Journal of adolescence*, 25, 243-255.

Week 13: Forgiveness

Seligman, M. (2002). Chapter 5.

Vaillant Chapter 3

Week 14: Aging well

Lockenhoff, C. E., & Carstensen, L. L. (2004). Socioemotional selectivity theory, aging, and health: The increasingly delicate balances between regulating emotions and making tough choices.

If you are interested in more information on this topic:
<http://longevity.stanford.edu/> (The Stanford Center on Longevity)

Week 15: Presentations