

COMM 400 Seminar in Communication
Narrative Theories of Communication
Tuesday and Thursday 11-12:20

Instructor: Daniel T. Durbin, Ph.D.

Office: ASCJ G21A

Office Hours: MW 11:30-12:00, TTh 1:30-2:00, TTh 10:30-11:00; and by appointment.

Phone: (213) 821-6615

Email: ddurbin@usc.edu

Course Objectives: This course focuses on the impact of narrative theory in the study of human communication. The primary goal is to help students master the basics of narrative theory and to develop research employing narrative theory. Students will study various concepts of narrative and literary theory, the growing interest in narrative in rhetorical studies, controversies over narrative as paradigmatic of human communication or a genre of human communication, and the role of narrative in postmodern ideas. Students will spend the semester developing a research project that will examine a rhetorical analysis using narrative theory. **Specific Outcomes for Students Include:** 1.) Become conversant in narrative theory and the interrelationship between literary, narrative and rhetorical concerns in the study of communication; 2.) Plan and write high level research in narrative criticism; 3.) Expand personal understanding and conception of the communication process.

Required Texts:

Fisher, Walter. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press 1989.

Murray, Penelope and Dorsch, T. S. (Ed. by) *Classical Literary Criticism*. London: Penguin Classics 2001.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1974.

Assigned Readings.

Assignments: Your primary assignment this semester will be to create a research paper examining a text of your choosing with the tools of narrative analysis. This assignment will be divided into several parts. You will also have one article report due during the semester and a final exam.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation-----10

Thesis Statement Paper-----	10
Article Review-----	20
Methodology Justification Paper-----	10
Final Paper-----	25
Final Exam-----	<u>25</u>
Total Points-----	100

A Note on Narrative Theory: The fundamental narrative approach outlined by Walter Fisher is very simple and fairly broad. It is often supplemented by other theoretical constructs more specific to the documents examined. You will need to at least employ the basics of narrative theory. However, our discussion of narrative approaches will go far beyond Fisher’s approach to give you a sense of the breadth of discussion (and philosophical interest) these ideas have produced.

A Note on Making Money: USC has a number of ways for students to make money off their research projects (Provost’s grants, travel funds, the Provost’s undergraduate research symposium, among others). We will discuss some of these in class. However, note that, if you find a way to get money out of USC for your research, you will have gone a long way toward demonstrating it as valuable work in this class.

Article Review: At least once during the semester, you will need to take the role of discussion leader in presenting ideas from an article in our field that has employed (or argued) narrative theory. In the unlikely event that you might need extra credit help, there is the possibility that I might offer some extra credit for an extra article review. For each review, you will need to produce a 1-2 page outline of the article (any outline longer than two pages will be rejected and you will have to take it back, edit it, and resubmit it before presenting it to the class). You will need to make sufficient copies of the outline for each person in the class to have a copy. The outline will give the basic structure of the article’s argument. You will discuss the article while using the outline as a reference (not as a text to read) in presenting your article. As communication scholars, it is expected that you will have superior communication skills in presenting your article and you will be graded accordingly (presentation will have more impact on your grade than the outline). You will have fifteen minutes to present your article in class.

Final Exam: Your final exam will be an essay exam in which you will be asked to explain and apply concepts from the class.

Readings and Class: Your required texts for this class are texts you should be reading in graduate school. That said, class discussion will make the key ideas very clear. This class is constructed much like a graduate class with an interactive seminar approach rather than pure lecture. So, much of our time will involve discussion, looking at and analyzing illustrations, and engaged interaction. Unless specifically instructed otherwise, all computers, cellphones, mp3

players, and tablets are to be closed and stored during class. We will likely have some moments when we look information up online. So, feel free to bring computers. However, no electronic devices will be allowed to interrupt or distract from class discussion.

Paper Grades: All written work is to be typed following the guidelines for research paper writing found in either the MLA or APA handbook. Papers will be graded on quality of organization, clarity and depth of analysis, and writing competence. Each error in spelling or grammar will result in a reduction in your paper grade. Papers with excessive errors in spelling or grammar (roughly 15) will be returned for a rewrite. Returned papers will have a zero until rewritten. All rewritten papers will automatically lose one letter grade for having been rewritten. I will act as your helpful neighborhood editor on your first couple papers. If you follow the editing instructions from your first papers, you should be able to put together a sparkling final paper. This class is a collaborative (not a judgmental) process. My goal is to help you write the best research you can.

Participation and Absence Policy: Attendance in class cannot be counted as participation. Students will receive participation grades based on the quality and quantity of their vocal participation in class throughout the semester. You will be allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. **Each** absence beyond three will result in an automatic 2% deduction from your final class grade. Also, remember that, when you are absent, you cannot participate in class. So, absences will also impact your participation grade. Being tardy or leaving class early will be counted as half an absence. Also, please turn off cell phones while in class. Leaving class to answer a cell phone will be counted as an absence.

Late Work: All late papers will be docked one letter grade for each class period they are late. Any time after the **start** of the class in which the papers are due will be considered late.

Disability Services: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Students requesting accommodations for taking tests in DSP must have their information to me and DSP in sufficient time to set up accommodations at DSP.

Academic Integrity: The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the Scampus guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report **all** violations of the code. Any serious violations or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

Tentative Due Dates and Reading Schedule

8/27 Class Introduction, Syllabus Distribution.

8/29-9/5 Classical Theories; Aristotle's "Poetics," "On the Sublime," Fisher ch. 1 (pp. 1-23).
Paper Topics Due 9/3.

9/10-9/19 A Burkean Approach; Burke, "The Philosophy of Literary Form" (pp. 1-137, "Debunking" pp. 168-190). **Thesis Statement Due 9/19.**

9/24-10/3 Applied Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'My Battle'" (pp. 191-220); "War, Response and Contradiction" (pp. 234-257); "Literature as Equipment for Living" (pp. 293-304).
Articles Due 9/26.

10/8-10/10 Beyond Burke: Logic and Narrative Reasoning, Fisher, ch. 2 (pp. 24-56).

10/15-10/24 Narrative as Paradigmatic of Human Communication, Fisher chs. 3-4 (pp. 57-104).
Methodology Paper Due 10/24.

10/29-10/31 Student Article presentations. **All Article Presentations due 10/29.**

11/5-11/12 Karl Wallace, Wayne Booth, "Good Reasons" and Narrative, Fisher ch. 5 (pp. 105-123).

11/14-11/21 Audiences and Narrative, Fisher ch. 6 (pp. 124-143); Mythologies, Images, Barthes and Some Related Issues.

11/26-12/3 Applications of Narrative Theory; Fisher chs. 7-9 (pp. 143-193).

12/5 Conclusions. **All Final Papers Due 12/5.**

Final Exam: December 17 11-1.