

# USC Annenberg

School for Communication  
and Journalism

## **COMM 304: Interpersonal Communication**

**Spring 2020 (4 units)**

**Time and Location: MW 10-11:50 am, ANN L116**

**Office Hours: MW 12:30-2:30 pm, ANN Lobby**

**Instructor: Paromita Sengupta, [psengupt@usc.edu](mailto:psengupt@usc.edu)**

### **Course Description**

This class is an introduction to interpersonal communication (IC). The purpose of this class is to help you learn about communication within various types of interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships, work relationships, health provider-patient relationships, etc.). Moreover, this course will examine the stages of relational development; specifically, we will explore communication processes during relational initiation, maintenance, and termination. Because IC is multi-disciplinary, and our understanding of it is constantly evolving, we will study perspectives from various fields, including communication, technology, and social and developmental psychology.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

The readings, assignments, and lectures are structured to encourage critical thinking and to enhance your understanding of IC from both academic and applied perspectives. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. explain major concepts and theories in IC as well as apply them constructively to real-life scenarios and in your papers and exams
2. explore definitions of "interpersonal relationships," and examine how communication influences their development, maintenance, and dissolution
3. study various theoretical perspectives that provide a framework for understanding how and why individuals communicate the way they do in interpersonal relationships;
4. critically examine scholarly research on communicating in interpersonal relationships
5. demonstrate understanding of course content by producing scholarly written work

6. apply various concepts covered in this course to our own practical processes and problems.

## **Class Assignments**

**Blog Posts and Participation** – All readings must be completed before class. Students must submit a short blog post (200-600 words) that engages with the week’s readings by 9 pm the day before class. Blog posts can take the form of a brief analysis, a relevant case study, or a question/comment about the readings, as long as they engage **critically** with the material. The blog posts will be used to stimulate discussions during class, and will serve as a way for students to organize their thoughts around issues in the reading that they found particularly compelling or confusing. Blog posts are not mandatory for the weeks when other writing assignments are due.

**Interpersonal Journal** – Each student will be required to keep an “interpersonal journal”, either in analog form, or digitally using a word processing program or journal app of your choosing. At the end of each two weeks of the semester, you will be required to identify and reflect on 2 positive and 2 negative interpersonal interactions (both face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions qualify) that you have had with family, friends, strangers, romantic partners, or work colleagues, and write a 200-300 word piece contextualizing the interaction within the theories we discuss in class. The journal will be graded in its entirety at the end of the course. You are encouraged to share the entries in class and refer to them in your blog posts.

**Art Critique (Group presentation)** – The world of art is teeming with social commentary. For this assignment, students will be divided into groups. Each group will be responsible for selecting an artist whose work explores interpersonal/FTF/computer-mediated relationships and creating a 10-minute presentation group presentation analyzing the themes that emerge from their work. **Groups must share their plans and materials with me 48 hours before presenting.** Additional details will be posted on BB.

**Papers** – You will be assigned two papers that will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of concepts and theories from the course and your ability to apply them constructively. To get a good grade, you must write at a level appropriate for a university student – properly articulate your ideas and show good command of organization, grammar and punctuation, spelling, and citation. Additional details for papers 1 and 2 will be made available on BB.

- ***Paper 1 (Social Media Analysis)***: Examine the online social interactions of a celebrity or influencer and use the theories of interpersonal communication discussed in class to analyze how they interact with their fan base on social media. You may use any social

media platform of your choosing (Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, Snapchat, etc), or do a cross-analysis using data from multiple platforms. Write a 3-5 page analysis summarizing your project, your chosen methodology, and your key findings.

- **Paper 2 (Self-Help Book Analysis):** Read a popular self-help advice book of your choosing on romantic relationships, friendship, or co-worker communication. The paper should be a 3-5 page analysis which includes a brief synopsis of the book, a description of what you think might be the intended audience for the book, and 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses of the book. Use theories from the textbook and class discussions to guide your thinking.

**How to submit:** You should upload papers to BB using Turnitin *before* class on the dates they are due. Late papers will be marked down 1 point each day they are late. If technology issues get in the way and you're up against the clock, make sure to email me your paper.

**Final Exam** – The final exam is meant to assess your comprehension of the readings and lecture materials, and your ability to apply IC concepts and theories. Exams will be graded blind. Please bring a blue book for the final exam.

**Extra Credit** – Various extra credit assignments may present themselves throughout the semester, and will be shared with the class accordingly.

In case of an extreme emergency that requires you to reschedule an exam, please let me know *before* the scheduled exam time. You also need to provide documentation of the emergency as soon as possible.

### **Required Reading Materials**

Guerrero, L. K., Andersen, P. A., & Afifi, W. A. (2018). *Close encounters: Communication in relationships* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage

Spitzberg and Cupach. (2009). *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication*. New Jersey: Taylor & Francis.

**Additional required readings, posted on Blackboard (subject to change)**

- Branje, S. (2018). Development of Parent–Adolescent Relationships: Conflict Interactions as a Mechanism of Change. *Child Development Perspectives*, 0(0), 1-6. doi: 10.1111/cdep.12278
- Buunk, B. P., & Schaufeli, W. B. (1999). Reciprocity in interpersonal relationships: An evolutionary perspective on its importance for health and well-being. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 10(1), 259-291. doi: 10.1080/14792779943000080
- Cialdini, R. (2016). Unity 1: Being together (Ch. 11). In *Pre-Suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade* (pp. 173-191). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Cialdini, R. (2016). Unity 2: Acting together (Ch. 12). In *Pre-Suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade* (pp. 192-208). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Lehrer, J. (2009). The moral mind (Ch. 6). In *How we decide* (pp. 167-195). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Pentland, A. (2012). The new science of building great teams. *HBR*, 90(4), 60-69.
- Steinberg, L. (2001). We know some things: Parent–adolescent relationships in retrospect and prospect. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 11(1), 1-19.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 13(2), 65-93.
- Chen, C.-P. (2016). Forming digital self and parasocial relationships on YouTube. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(1), 232–254.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540514521081>
- Jenkins, H., & Shresthova, S. (2012). Up, up, and away! The power and potential of fan activism. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0435>
- Boyd, D. (2007). Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning–Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume*, 119–142.
- Van Zoonen, L. (2004). Imagining the fan democracy. *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 39–52.
- Alison Phipps, Jessica Ringrose, Emma Renold & Carolyn Jackson (2018) Rape culture, lad culture and everyday sexism: researching, conceptualizing and politicizing new mediations of gender and sexual violence, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27:1, 1-8, DOI: [10.1080/09589236.2016.1266792](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1266792)
- Sophie Sills, Chelsea Pickens, Karishma Beach, Lloyd Jones, Octavia Calder-Dawe, Paulette Benton-Greig & Nicola Gavey (2016) Rape culture and social media: young critics and a feminist counterpublic, *Feminist Media Studies*, 16:6, 935-951, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2015.1137962](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1137962)

## Grading

An “A” grade represents excellent work. A “B” grade represents good work. A “C” grade means you satisfactorily met all of the requirements of an assignment. Incomplete work may be eligible for an “IN” mark [1].

If you would like to meet to discuss a grade or feedback, please *wait 24 hours before contacting me*. I am happy to answer your questions but ask that you take a day to digest my comments and suggestions for improvements.

Grades are based on the following scale: **A**, 93-100; **A-**, 90-92; **B+**, 87-89; **B**, 83-86; **B-**, 80-82; **C+**, 77-79; **C**, 73-76; **C-**, 70-72; **D+**, 67-69; **D**, 63-66; **D-**, 60-62; and **F**, 59 or below.

### Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Attendance and Class Participation	10%
Blog Posts	10%
Interpersonal Journal	10%
Art Critique (Group Presentation)	20%
Social Media Analysis Paper	20%
Self-Help Book Analysis	20%
Final Exam	10%

### Course Policies

**Attendance and participation** – Classroom discussions are only as engaging and dynamic as the students in it. As such, *attendance and participation are expected*. Although I will not “take attendance,” we will have impromptu quizzes in class throughout the semester that will count towards your grade. You cannot make up quizzes without a valid excused absence.

**Valid excused absence and missed class** – Valid excused absences include religious holy-day obligations, University-sponsored athletic “away” events, death in the family, and personal

medical emergencies. Students who miss a class due to these circumstances should contact me *before* the class they will miss and must provide written documentation.

**Emails** – Please feel free to email me at [psengupt@usc.edu](mailto:psengupt@usc.edu) with requests for in-person appointments and to ask questions not answered in the syllabus or on BB. Emails are not appropriate for discussions about grades or conversations best had during office hours. I will do my best to answer your emails promptly. If I do not respond within 48 hours, please follow up.

### **Academic and Classroom Conduct, and Support Systems**

The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. *Plagiarism*, or presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words, is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

You are expected to engage in behaviors that enhance the learning environment. *Bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual assault, or any other disrespectful, disruptive behaviors will not be tolerated.* Be respectful of everyone's contributions and opinions, whether or not you agree. Contact me directly and immediately with any incidents of bias, hate crimes, or micro-aggressions that happen in class. Please also report any such incidents to the USC Student Affairs office: (213) 740-2421, [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support).

### **Classroom Values**

**Empathy:** Learning about communication and culture requires both critical engagement and an empathetic approach to conditions and experiences which are different from our own. Our classroom needs to be a safe place to explore communication contexts and an open place to reconsider our preconceptions of communication, its power, and its use in our everyday lives.

**Gender-Inclusive Language:** Everyone should be referred to by the name they prefer, the correct pronunciation of their name, and the pronoun they prefer (like she, ze, he, or they). Please be

respectful throughout the course. If you feel uncomfortable, do not hesitate to talk to me privately during office hours.

**Disability:** I work to ensure that my classroom and my course are not ableist. If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please see Disability Services to obtain a letter specifying the particular accommodations you require. Bring that letter to me at the beginning of the course so that I can prepare your accommodations. If you have any questions at any point throughout the semester, please feel free to talk with me and/or Disability Services.

### **Technology Use**

The use of laptops and tablets is allowed in class, as long as the technology is used to engage **critically and organically** with lectures and class discussions. You are encouraged to use digital tools to look up references, fact-check arguments, participate in class group discussions, and contribute to shared note-taking during lectures. You may NOT use digital technology for other purposes, including (but not limited to) discussing out-of-class activities, checking emails, online shopping, or watching media that is not relevant to class discussions.

### **Support Systems**

*Student Health Counseling Services – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX – (213) 740-5086*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: Race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support – (213) 740-2421*  
[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs – (213) 740-0776*  
[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*  
[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*USC Writing Center*  
[dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter](http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter)

Assists students with writing and editing for papers and similar assignments.

*Diversity at USC – (213) 740-2101*  
[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and other resources.

*USC Emergency – UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*



[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call  
[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

**Course Schedule** (*subject to change*)

Week	Date	Topic	Due Before Class	Read Before Class
1	01/13	Course Introduction		NASA Space Project Activity
	01/15	Defining Interpersonal Communication		Key and Peele, “Text Message Confusion”
2	01/20	<b>NO CLASS – MLK Day</b>		
	01/22	Social identity and stereotypes		- <a href="#">Social Identity Theory</a> (read page, watch all videos) - Tajfel (1974), <i>recommended</i>  Social Group Discussion Questions  “Hoodie” Brooklyn 99: “Moo Moo”  Starbucks #RaceTogether Campaign

3	01/27	Communicating identity, self-presentation		Guerrero (et al.), Ch. 2 Non-Verbal Group Introduction Activity
	01/29	IC in the Workplace		Pentland (2012) Group Sabotage Activity
4	02/03	Attraction		Guerrero, Ch. 3
	02/05	Uncertainty and expectations		- Guerrero, Ch. 4 - Buunk & Schaufeli (1999)
5	2/10	Changing relationships		Guerrero, Ch. 5
	02/12	Self-disclosure and privacy		Guerrero, Ch. 6 Heineken Beer Ad
6	02/17	<b>NO CLASS – President’s Day</b>		
	02/19	Affection, intimacy, and social support		Guerrero, Ch. 7
7	02/24	Love and attachment; Communicating sexually		Guerrero, Ch. 8 & 9
	02/26	Sexual Abuse and Rape Culture		Sills et al., (205); Phipps et al. (2018)
8	03/02	<b>Group Presentation: Art Critique</b>		
	03/04	The Political Impact of IC		Boyd, Jenkins and Shestova, van Zoonen

9	03/09	Unity		Cialdini (2016), Ch. 11 & 12
	03/11	The Digital Realm and IC.	<b>Paper 1 (Social Media Analysis) due</b>	- Sbarra (2018) - 2 from this list (read intro, methods, and discussion): Banks (2017), Bayer, Chan (2017), David-Cambre (2016), Sheldon-Bryan  Black Mirror: "Nosedive"
	03/16	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Recess</b>		
	03/18	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Recess</b>		
10	03/23	Film Screening: <i>Arrival</i>		No readings
	03/25	Film Discussion: <i>Arrival</i>		No readings, but come prepared to discuss journal entries and blog posts in the context of themes from the film
11	03/30	Staying close: Maintaining relationships		Guerrero, Ch. 10
	04/01	The Dark Side of IC		Spitzberg and Cupach, Ch. 1, 3
12	04/06	Conflict, Dominance, and Power plays		Guerrero, Ch. 11, 12

	04/08	Hurting the ones we love		- Guerrero, Ch. 13 - Lehrer (2009), Ch. 6
13	04/13	Healing the hurt	<b>Paper 2 (Self Help Book Analysis) due</b>	Guerrero, Ch. 14
	04/15	Ending relationships		Guerrero, Ch. 15
14	04/20	Transgressions and Forgiveness		Spitzberg and Cupach, Ch. 7, 9
	04/22	Child Development and Family Communication		- Branje (2018) - Steinberg (2001)
15	04/27	Final exam review		
	05/11	<b>Final Exam</b>		
	05/13	<b>Interpersonal Journal Due by 12 pm</b>		

**GP** = Group Presentation

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[1] "IN" reflects incomplete work due to a documented illness or emergency after the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. The student must make arrangements to get an "IN" before the final exam and must meet all University requirements. Students have one year from the date of receiving an "IN" to complete the course for a final letter grade.