Recommended for students with junior or senior class standing after successful completion of COMM 200 or COMM 304

COMM 336 Communicating about Sex

Instructor: Jillian Pierson, Ph.D.  
Office Hours: ASC G211F

I’m available many times other than what’s listed here as my official hours. We can usually talk before or after class, we can set a meeting for a different time or we can meet by phone. You can text me to see if I’m in my office before heading over—even the official hours sometimes are disrupted by meetings or talks I’m attending, so it’s a good idea to check first.

Sometimes talking is much more useful than emailing. We can set up a phone appointment if we’re unable to meet during office hours.

Please text me only with a very quick “are you in your office” type of question—otherwise, email for content or assignment-related questions.

Course Description
We’re good at joking about sex, fear mongering, and titillating. Where we get awkward is when the conversation gets real. Social science research consistently finds that communication about sex is positively related with all kinds of desirable (pun noted) sexual health outcomes; but culturally and socially created sexual scripts tend to inhibit frank conversations. Incorporating readings, lectures, and discussion, we will engage in an open, research-based conversation about sex and sexuality. We will investigate the ways in which communication and sexuality relate to one another and learn about current research and theory.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, students will be able to
• explain the advantages and disadvantages of the ambiguity of sexual terminology
• recognize and recall major terms and theories in the field of sexual communication
• identify media and society’s influences on sexual relationships
• describe the role communication plays on sexual health
• select which theories provide the best fit with specific communication scenarios
Required Course Materials
All assigned readings will be posted to Blackboard and should be completed prior to class on the day they are listed on the course calendar. The complete biography will be posted in the online version of the syllabus and in the “readings” tab on Blackboard.

Course Policies
No laptops or electronics.
In order to create the best possible learning environment, I ask you to please turn your cell phones off when you enter our classroom and to not open your laptops or tablets. I completely understand the temptation to multi-task but I think we’ll all benefit from focusing without technology. Read the articles I’ve posted on Blackboard on this topic for a lengthier discussion of this policy. Remember to bring pen and paper to class.

Submitting Assignments
Please use Blackboard to submit all of your assignments. I will rarely ever ask for a “hard copy” of your work, so you don’t need to print for this class.

Late Papers: If your assignment is late, it will likely be marked down by one third of a letter grade for every day it is late. Also, please be aware that if you end up handing a paper in late, it falls to the bottom of my stack of things to do and will most likely not be returned to you in a very timely manner.

Missed exams: Missing an exam is terrible all around. You would never do that unless you were really, seriously ill. Contact me immediately so we can try to remedy the situation and make sure you do not end up with a zero score.

Participation/Attendance:
Our class sessions combine lecture and discussion. Participation (including attendance, promptness, attentiveness, involvement in classroom activities, and discussion that clearly demonstrates you have kept up with the course material) may affect your grade by up to one third of a grade.

There is no need to discuss with me reasons for your absences since it is reasonable that in fifteen weeks, you would have cause to miss one, two or even three classes. If for some reason you suspect you may miss more than four class sessions, see me immediately to discuss whether you will need to withdraw from the course. While there is no “attendance” grade, you do have to attend regularly in order to pass the class.

When you miss class, please do not ask me what you missed. It is your responsibility to seek out that information from other students. Once you have done that, I welcome the opportunity to talk with you and to go over any questions.

Grading: A “C” grade should satisfactorily meet all the requirements of an assignment, including writing at a level appropriate for a university student. Allow yourself time for the writing process of pre-writing, writing, re-writing, revising, and a final proofreading.
I believe a “B” represents really good work. An “A” represents excellent work. If you are disappointed by a grade, I would be happy to discuss your work with you and help you improve for the next assignment.

The grading scale for this class will be that an A is 94 or above; A- is 90-93; B+ is 87-89; B is 84-86; B- is 80-83, C+ is 77-79 and so on.

Grades will be based on the following:
- Sexpectation paper: 10%
- In-class assignments: 10%
- Discussion leader / blog: 20%
- “Hot Topic” presentation: 20%
- Midterm exam: 20%
- Final exam: 20%

*You must complete all assignments to pass the course.*

**Tentative Course Schedule Subject to Change**: (dates are not updated yet for 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
<th>Read before class</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan</td>
<td>Intro to the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 11</td>
<td>A brief history of sex talk</td>
<td>Byers; Carpenter</td>
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<td>2 Jan</td>
<td>Sexual scripts:</td>
<td>Student Info Sheet</td>
<td>Frith &amp; Kitzinger; La France</td>
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<td>Jan 16</td>
<td>The gendered roles we play</td>
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<td>Morgan &amp; Zurbriggen; Vannier &amp; O’Sullivan</td>
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<td>Jan 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Jan</td>
<td>Sexual norms and behaviors</td>
<td>Montesi et al 2011 &amp; 2013</td>
<td>Theiss &amp; Solomon</td>
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<td>Jan 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 25</td>
<td>Communicating with partners and friends</td>
<td>Busse et al, Holman &amp; Sillars; Quinn-Nilas et al</td>
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<td>4 Jan</td>
<td>Self-disclosure &amp;</td>
<td>Babin; Coffelt &amp; Hess; Denes; Denes &amp; Afifi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 1</td>
<td>Privacy management</td>
<td>Anderson, Kunkel &amp; Dennis; Nichols</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Feb</td>
<td>Hookups &amp;</td>
<td>Sexpectations</td>
<td>Fielder et al; Garcia et al, Wentland &amp; Reissing</td>
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<td>Feb 6</td>
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<td>Bisson &amp; Levine; Epstein et al</td>
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<td>Feb 8</td>
<td>Friends with benefits</td>
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<td>6 Feb</td>
<td>Negotiating Safe Sex</td>
<td>Broadus et al; Earp; Horan; Parker</td>
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<td>Feb 13</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Collibee &amp; Furman; Gutzmer et al; Katz &amp; Myhr; Wong; Wright et al.</td>
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<td>Feb 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Feb</td>
<td>Coercion, Campus &amp;</td>
<td>Bersamin et al; Littleton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 20</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Flack et al; Labrie et al.</td>
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ASSIGNMENTS
One key to success will be reading all of my directions carefully. Some directions are in this syllabus but more will be given in class and posted on Blackboard. Always feel free to ask questions; I’d much rather clarify expectations in advance than learn afterwards that you didn’t fully understand the assignment.

In-Class Assignments
During class meetings, we will have a variety of participation activities including small group assignments and quizzes. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class, and if you miss by arriving late or leaving early, or by being absent altogether, you will not have an opportunity to make up the work. Therefore, your two lowest scores will be dropped from the grade calculation.
Sexpectations (approximately 3-5 page paper)
Our goal for this assignment is to become more critical consumers of sexual information and content provided in pop culture and to consider how those portrayals can affect viewers “in real life.”

Choose an artifact in pop culture that you believe reflects unrealistic or inaccurate portrayals of sex. You will then write a three to five page critique of the artifact in which you will:

1. Briefly introduce the artifact.
2. Describe what specifically is unrealistic or inaccurate
   a. using the framework of norms or scripts, citing at least one reading as support for that framework
   b. citing outside sources to support your claims of something being unrealistic
3. Discuss how the artifact’s portrayal could lead to sexual communication issues, insecurities or difficulties.

An artifact could be a scene from a movie, TV show, a music video, or a commercial. (If you’d prefer a different type of artifact, please run your idea by me.) I would like you to include a link to the artifact if possible.

Discussion Leader/ Magazine Article or Blog Post (approximately 3-5 page paper)
Your task is to read several readings on one topic and turn them into a blog post or magazine article (of sorts). The idea here is to take the assigned readings from a particular week (tba) and translate them from academic writing into an understandable, engaging article. You should write for an audience of laypeople in an engaging way, drawing out themes from the readings and providing your own reflection (although this is not a place to share personal anecdotes).

“Hot Topics” in Sexual Health (outline and informal 5-10 minute presentation)
This is an opportunity for you to learn more about a topic of interest and share it with the rest of us. You may choose something we covered in class but didn’t get into deeply enough, or you may investigate something new. Your topic is subject to my approval in advance.

You will research the topic using a minimum of five sources (a minimum of two should be academic sources, meaning from peer-reviewed journals); assemble an outline that incorporates the sources; and then take over teaching the class for 5-10 minutes on the day you’re assigned.
Exams
The exams in this class will cover readings, lectures and class discussions. Prepare for a challenging series of multiple choice and open-ended, short answer questions.

The final will not be “cumulative” in that you won’t have to go back to earlier materials and study them in depth. But your knowledge will build, and the final exam questions may reflect that knowledge base.

Remember that you are responsible for both the material presented in the readings and in class. The two do not always overlap. If you missed a class, it would be a good idea to get notes and discuss them with at least two other students.

Looking Ahead
I very much look forward to spending the semester with you, discussing and learning more about this interesting and important topic.
Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:
Plagiarism – 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. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu
COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Week 1 Background**
Byers, S. E. (2011). Beyond the birds and the bees and was it good for you?: Thirty years of research on sexual communication. *Canadian Psychology, 52*(1), 20-28.


**Week 2 Sexual Scripts**


**Week 3 Partners and Friends**


**Week 4  Self-Disclosure and Privacy Management**


**Week 5  Hookups and FWB**


**Week 6 Negotiating Safe Sex & Coercion**


Earp, B. E. (2015, Nov 12). People are terrified of sex: At least compared to other risky activities. *The Atlantic*.


Week 7 Campus sex; alcohol use.


Week 8 Porn


Week 9 Identity and Coming Out


**Week 10  Sex in the Digital Age; Comm in Families**


Byron, P., Albury, K., & Evers, C. (2013, May). "It would be weird to have that on Facebook": young people's use of social media and the risk of sharing sexual health information. *Reproductive Health Matters, 21*(41), 35-44.


**Week 11 Sexual Health Campaigns**


Week 13 Culture and Ethnicity


Week 14 Sexual Minorities


Week 14 Infidelity

