USCAnnenberg

COMM 200 (4 units, 20327)
Communication and Social Science
Fall 2025 T/T 11:00– 12:20 Room ANN L105A

Instructor:	Jillian Pierson, Ph.D. (213)821-1127 jilliank@usc.edu	Feel free to reach out to me by texting or calling my office phone number which comes to my mobile. Text for short messages only, please. Longer, content-related questions are best sent via email.
Office hours:	ASC G21 TBD	I encourage you to connect with me outside of our regularly scheduled class meetings!
		I recognize most students are in class during my office hours. If they don't work for you, please email or text whenever you'd like to come by or meet on Zoom (or by phone). I generally can meet before or after our class in-person. When you email, suggest a couple of times that work for you.
TAs	TBD	

Course Description

This class will introduce you to social scientific scholarship in human communication. I'd like you to complete this course recognizing how powerful communication theory can be in explaining the social world we are immersed in and appreciating that communication is much more than everyday talk and conversation. You will encounter a variety of areas of communication theory that may help you decide which parts of the discipline will become the focus of your studies. These will include interpersonal communication, organizational communication, small group communication, media studies, and persuasion.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:
- Define social science, communication, and communication as a social science
- Identify the perspectives researchers bring to the study of communication as a social science
- Explain theories of communication as a social science and critique them according to specific criteria
- Apply theoretical constructs to "real world" communication examples
- Describe recent research studies in communication

Required Texts

Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2023). *A first look at communication theory* (11th ed.). McGraw Hill.

[NOTE: The 11th edition is required. Do not use an earlier edition. You will need to cite this edition specifically in your assignments.]

A copy of *A First Look* (2023) is available on reserve for our class at Leavey Library.

Additional required readings will be posted on Brightspace and listed by abbreviated citations on the course calendar. These readings are subject to change. Brightspace will have the most recent, correct information so follow those postings.

Tentative Course Schedule **(THESE DATES WILL BE CHANGED FOR FALL 2025)**
This is our plan but please keep in mind we may have to make slight adjustments during the course of the semester. I will try to keep all due dates and exam dates in place but the topics may shift from this schedule.

The chapters in this calendar refer to the *A First Look* (11th edition) textbook. Other readings will be found on Brightspace.

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment due	Readings for **after** class
1	Jan 14	Course welcome & introduction		COSSA Read "About Social Science" and the six pdfs about the contributions of social science
	Jan 16	Communication as a social science	Student Info Quiz due end of day	Avoiding plagiarism; Perry & Perry (2016)
2	Jan 21	Evaluating theories; axioms of comm	Academic integrity due end of day	Mazur (2013) Chapter 1
	Jan 23	Research strategies		Chapter 3; Axioms
3	Jan 28	Attribution theory & Uncertainty reduction		Chapter 9; Attribution Theory Monge et al. (2024)
	Jan 30	Nonverbal communication; Expectancy violations theory	Research paradigm Due Jan 31 by 11:59 pm	Afifi (2013); Chapter 6
4	Feb 4	Cognitive dissonance theory		Suggested: Tang (2022)
	Feb 6	(cont.)		Chapter 16
5	Feb 11	**Exam 1 (bring laptop)**	Exam 1	
	Feb 13	Interpersonal comm Politeness theory		Goldsmith (2013); Suggested: Kelly et al. (2019)
6	Feb 18	Social penetration theory and social exchange theory		Chapter 8
	Feb 20	Relational dialectics theory		Chapter 11
7	Feb 25	RDT continued; CMPT		Chapter 12
	Feb 27	CPMT; Intercultural comm		Suggested: Hammonds, 2015

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment due	Readings for **after** class
8	Mar 4	Intercultural communication; Communication accommodation		Division 5 intro; Chapter 25
	Mar 6	Face negotiation theory	Theory exploration Mar 7 by 11:59 pm	Chapter 26; Suggested: Giles et al., 2012; Kirschbaum, 2012
9	Mar 11	**Exam 2 (bring laptop)**	Exam 2	
	Mar 13	Group comm		Chapter 20; Groupthink Suggested: Ricciardelli et al. (2021)

March 17 – March 21 Enjoy Spring Break

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment due	Readings for **after** class
10	Mar 25	Group comm (cont.)		Chapter 21
	Mar 27	Org comm		Chapter 23
11	Apr 1	Org comm (cont.)		Chapter 22 Suggested: Herrmann (2018)
	Apr 3	Org comm and networks		Weick; Org control and assimilation
12	Apr 8	networks (cont.)		Chapter 13; Networks Suggested: Zhen et al. (2023)
	Apr 10	Persuasion		Chapter 15; Cialdini
13	Apr 15	Persuasion (cont.)		Chapter 14
	Apr 17	(cont.)	Application paper Due April 18 at 11:59 pm	Planned Behavior Suggested: Wang et al., (2021); Rumble et al., 2017
14	Apr 22	Media richness and SIP		Chapter 10; 35
	Apr 24	Mediated and Mass Comm		Chapters 36, 37
15	Apr 29	Mass comm (cont.)		Social cognitive theory Suggested: Falgoust et al. (2022); Chung (2014)
	May 1	Exam 3		
	May 14	**Final assignment due at 2 pm**		

Course Policies

I've included policies to help you succeed and to make the class environment positive and conducive to learning. Please read through them all. We may build on these together.

Respectful conversation

We may touch on topics that some students feel sensitive about during class. If you find yourself having an emotional response, please reach out to me. Know that I want everyone to feel

comfortable engaging in productive, open conversation, including at the times we don't agree with one another. If I get something wrong, I'd like to hear from you in a respectful way; I have an open mind and like most people, I am still learning and evolving.

I also hope you'll be mindful that we all come to the classroom from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. While we can't always fully understand another person's perspective, we can listen with acceptance and empathy.

Attendance and Participation
1. To get the most out of this class, you must show up for our meetings, including both lectures and discussion sections. While it is normal to miss a few times during the course of a semester, you cannot claim to have taken this class without having attended regularly.

2. Of course you may occasionally have to miss class for illness or other reasons. When you are absent, I do not want you to email me any kind of excuse or notification. (Students often have perfectly legitimate reasons to miss class; I'm not judging you!) However, if you have to miss several classes, I would appreciate your letting me know what is going on, so that I don't worry about you.

> If you miss more than six classes, your overall grade for the course will be lowered. Similarly, if you are consistently late to class, leave early, or disappear during class for lengthy periods of time, your grade may be lowered.

> If a student misses 12 classes or more, they cannot pass the class regardless of the quality of the work submitted. Should you find yourself approaching this absence danger zone, please communicate with me to see if we can prevent this negative outcome.

3. When you miss class, you should ask two other students for their notes from class. After you've reviewed any slides and read students' notes, feel free to come to us with questions.

4. Participation credit will be given on occasion during lectures and discussion section meetings. If you miss class, it will be your responsibility to find the alternative participation opportunity on Brightspace to receive credit. Your alternative participation assignment must be submitted no later than one week from the date of the missed class, or you will not receive credit for it.

5. If you added the class late, you are still responsible for the material and assignments you missed. Please submit any homework and participation assignments no later than Friday of the fourth week of class.

No laptops or electronics in lecture.
In order to create the best possible learning environment, I ask you to not use your laptops, tablets, or phones. I completely understand the temptation, but I think we all benefit from focusing without technology. Current research shows that taking notes by hand is more effective than typing them. Read the articles posted on Brightspace for a lengthier discussion of this policy. (Sometimes students have documented reasons for using laptops for note-taking; exceptions are made only for students with such documentation from OSAS or those who have

been assigned as official notetakers.)

Please bring pen and paper to lectures for note-taking and activities. If you are using an iPad or other tablet instead of pen and paper, that is acceptable as long as you keep your device open to the note-taking app only.

The three exams will require use of a laptop, so they will be an exception to the "no laptop" rule.

Please turn off all notifications and sounds on your devices before each class meeting begins.

Communication
Please be sure to read your USC emails and Brightspace announcements daily on weekdays.

When you write to us, please put COMM 200 in the subject line of your email!

I reply to my emails within 24 hours (although on the weekends I may take longer). If you don't hear back from me promptly, feel free to send me a follow-up after a day has gone by.

Timely submission of work: The main assignments in this class will be due on Friday at 11:59 pm (e.g., the research paradigm, the theory exploration, and the application paper). If you cannot submit by Friday at 11:59 pm, submit a request for a 48 hour extension to the assignment itself. By Sunday night at 11:59 pm, submit the actual completed assignment. (This policy will not apply to the final assessment which will not be accepted after May 14 at 4 pm.)

Beyond that Sunday night extension, if your assignment is late, it will 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 our stack of things to do and will most likely not be returned to you in a very timely manner.

Sometimes a student has a true emergency. Please contact me and your TA as soon as possible if an emergency prevents you from submitting your work on time.

Accidentally uploading the wrong assignment or a corrupted file is not a valid excuse for a late submission. Brightspace cannot display documents submitted in Pages format; if using Pages please convert your document to a PDF before uploading to Brightspace.

Back up your work: Computer failures are sadly not uncommon. Please cover yourself by regularly saving your work to cloud storage and to an external storage device.

Electronic submission of assignments
Please upload your assignments to Brightspace only.

If Brightspace has a problem, you may email your assignment to your TA as proof that you completed it by the deadline. However, we can only grade in the Brightspace environment so you will still need to upload there as soon as the system is functioning.

Accommodations for students with registered disabilities

Please upload your letter from OSAS to the "assignment" I've created for it on Brightspace. If there's anything specific about your accommodations you'd like me to know, I would be very happy to talk with you and support you however I can.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy
Unless explicitly allowed otherwise in the specific assignment instructions, any uncredited use of Artificial Intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, and many others) is considered plagiarism by the School of Communication and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Please keep in mind that generative AI can be both a useful tool and a cause for concern. As the technology rapidly evolves, we students of communication need to be thoughtful and ethical consumers of the technology. Please keep in mind some important considerations when using generative AI:

1. You must **give credit** to the specific AI used if you use one in an assignment. Check Brightspace and the specific assignment instructions for information about how to do that appropriately. Failing to cite AI use is an academic integrity violation and will be treated as such, with potentially serious consequences.

2. Generative AI often is incorrect and gives **misinformation** through its "hallucinations." You cannot rely on AI output; you have to check for correctness.

3. The **quality of the prompts** shapes the quality of the output of generative AI. As these tools develop, our skills in "conversing" with them will need to change and grow too.

4. AI should never be a substitute for your own **thoughtful, critical contributions** to the subject matter. Expressing oneself through writing is an important part of learning, refining thought, and demonstrating understanding that cannot be ceded to AI tools.

5. If there is any suspicion of inappropriate AI usage in your assignments, I might ask you to **orally defend your work and ideas** in a meeting with me and/or the dean of student affairs.

Do not use Grammarly or other AI-empowered software to enhance, correct, or alter your written work.

These are just a few of many considerations that I wanted to highlight at present. I expect my own knowledge and policies in this arena to evolve, and I welcome your thoughts.

Grading
The grading scale for this class will be that an A is equivalent to 94 or above; A- is 90-93; B+ is 87-89; B is 84-86; B- is 80-83; C+ is 77-79; C is 74-76; C- is 70-73; D+ is 67-69; D is 64-66; D- is 60-63; and F is 59 and below.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Homework/In-Class Work	10%
Research Paradigm	10%
Theory Exploration	15%
Application paper	15%
Exam 1	10%
Exam 2	15%
Exam 3	15%
Final assignment	10%

Grades are earned according to the following standards:

A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.
P/ NP	To earn a passing grade, you must have a C- or higher. You also may not omit any assignments, i.e., you cannot earn a "P" without completing the theory exploration, the application paper, and all three exams regardless of your average score in the class.

We will do our best to get you feedback on assignments within two weeks of the due date. If you have questions about a grade you earned on an assignment, you have one week after the grade was posted to inquire about it via email.

No "Extra Credit"
This class gives you many opportunities to succeed. The ten percent homework/in-class work specifically gives you an opportunity to get full credit without any evaluation. Do homework on time, come to class to get credit for participation (or do the makeup participation assignments if you have to miss), and you'll have an automatic 100% or "A" in ten percent of the class.

Requests for Grade Changes
At the end of the semester, do not write me asking me to "bump" your grade. I do mathematical rounding, so for example, an 83.6 will be the same as an 84, earning a "B" grade. But I will not take a grade after the semester has ended and change it because you worked hard and didn't get the grade you thought you should have. Grades are based on your success on assignments and exams.

However, if you believe an error was made, please email me promptly with an explanation of the mistake so I can correct it.

I download the grades from Brightspace and calculate them in a spreadsheet; I review each grade individually before finally submitting them to the registrar.

Assignments

More information will be given in class and posted on Brightspace, but these descriptions will help you get a sense of our plans.

Homework/In-Class Work (10%)

All homework and in-class work assignments are credited via labor-based grading only. In other words, you merely do the assignment on time and get full credit. These assignments include the following:

Student Information Sheet

Please complete and upload to Brightspace. We want to get to know you and to have your contact information on hand.

Academic Integrity Tutorial

Please complete the assigned tutorial listed on Brightspace, and then upload a screenshot of your certificate of completion.

In-Class Work

During both lecture and discussion meetings, we will have a variety of participation activities. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class and will not be scheduled in advance but randomly distributed throughout the semester. If you miss synchronous class, please look at Brightspace to check for alternative participation assignments.

Research Paradigm Assignment (10%)

1. Find and read a recent research article in communication from one of the communication journals listed for this assignment on Brightspace.
2. Turn in the citation for the article along with the article's published abstract.
3. Based on the information presented in class and in the text, write a brief paragraph or two explaining which perspective the author(s) took and what about their work made that perspective evident.
4. Be prepared to briefly explain the study you read during your discussion section meeting.

Be sure to choose a *research* article in which the authors conducted an actual study. Do not choose a meta-analysis (a study of other studies), a book review, an essay, or an article that only discusses theory.

Theory Exploration (15%)

In this assignment you will describe a theory in your own words, describe how it is being used in a recent research study, and offer an original example of the theory in action. Check Brightspace for further information.

Application Paper (15%)
This 5-7 page paper is an opportunity to apply the theories and concepts you've learned about communication to *examples* you observe. Detailed information about the assignment will be posted on Brightspace and discussed in class.

Exams (first exam is 10%; the second two exams are 15% each)
The exams assess if you have learned the material covered in the readings, lectures, and class discussions. They will also ask you to put your knowledge to use by applying it to material presented in new examples. Prepare for a series of rigorous multiple choice questions on the exams. If you know yourself to be someone who finds these kinds of tests particularly challenging, check my posts on Brightspace for tips and seek help early in the semester.

Please note that you are responsible for the material presented both in the readings and in class, even if the two do not overlap.

The third exam will not be "cumulative" in that you won't have to go back to the earlier chapters and study them in depth, but your knowledge will build and questions on later exams may rely on that foundation.

Final assessment (**10%**)
This will be a project due on the day of the university-scheduled final exam. Details will be forthcoming.

Campus Resources
Please take advantage of some of the resources your tuition supports. Early in the semester, connect with The Writing Center for one-on-one assistance or small-group workshops. (Email writing@usc.edu or call 213-740-3691). If you have difficulty with tests, reach out to the Center for Academic Support (call 213-740-0776 or email them at study@usc.edu).

Honoring Native Lands

Our USC campus is located on the traditional land of the Tongva People. It is a complicated reality that we exist in a space which for many years belonged to the Tongva who have been here for at least 10,000 years. I would like to acknowledge the unjust, violent history that unfolded over many years before and during the establishment of this university, and to show appreciation and humility toward indigenous communities and the sacrifices they have been forced to make.

Looking Ahead
Exploring the field of communication is an ongoing experience of discovery for me. I look forward to learning more with all of you this semester.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonestly and is strictly prohibited. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:
USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:
To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:
Annenberg Student Success Fund
The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund
Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

Counseling and Mental Health - *(213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - *988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call*
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - *(213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - *(213) 740-5086*
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - *(213) 740-2500*

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - *(213) 740-0776*
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - *(213) 740-0411*
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - *(213) 740-2101*
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - *UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*
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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call*
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - *(213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - *(323) 442-2850 or* otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

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