



COMM 304 (4 units, 20475)
Interpersonal Communication
Fall 2024 T/T 12:30 – 1:50 Room ANN 210

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. 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! Aside from these hours, please email or text whenever you'd like to come by or meet on Zoom. I generally can meet before or after our class in-person. I'm also available via Zoom (or phone) most Fridays. When you email, suggest a couple of times that work for you.

Course Description

This class is an exploration of the field of interpersonal communication, an area of scholarship that looks at how communication builds, maintains, and changes relationships. The term “relationships” covers more than romance and friendship; we’ll include a number of contexts including families, health care, and digital environments.

This is an academic course, so we will work toward increasing your conceptual understanding and critical thinking; we are not focusing on your own personal communication skills. However, many students will find that the understanding we build throughout the semester will enhance their own communication in relationships.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, you should be able to define the terminology used by interpersonal communication scholars; explain the major concepts, issues and theories of this field; and recognize and apply the course concepts to mediated depictions and to real-world situations where these ideas are at play.

Required Course Materials

Guerrero, L. K., Andersen, P. A., & Afifi, W. A. (2021). *Close encounters: Communication in relationships* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Additional readings will be posted on Brightspace and are noted on the course calendar with the authors’ last names and dates. These readings are subject to change as I may update to titles that are tailored to our class.

This is a sample syllabus which will be revised for Fall of 2025

Tentative Course Schedule, *Subject to Change*:

Assignments are due on the days they are listed; readings can be done after the class meeting on the dates they're listed on. The textbook chapters are listed on this calendar as GAA and they represent the bulk of your readings. The articles are posted on Brightspace and additional links may be added so please check our site frequently.

[These dates are from Fall 2024. The schedule and specifics will be changed for Fall 2025]

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment due before class	Readings for after class
1	Aug 27	Course welcome & introduction		
	Aug 29	Defining interpersonal comm	Student intro form	GAA Ch 1
2	Sept 3	Identity & self-presentation	Identity exploration	GAA Ch 2
	Sept 5	in "real life" and online		Verduyn et al. (2020)
3	Sept 10	Interpersonal comm theories		GAA Ch 4
	Sept 12	(cont.)	Reading response 1	GAA Ch 6 Donovan et al. (2017) Nuru & Wang (2014)
4	Sept 17	Attraction		GAA Ch 3
	Sept 19	& mate selection	Reading response 2	Hall & Compton 2017 Neyt et al. (2020) Oltmanns et al. 2016
5	Sept 24	Relational development		GAA Ch 5
	Sept 26	phases and stages	Quiz	GAA Ch 15
6	Oct 1	Love and attachment	Paper artifact selected	GAA Ch 8
	Oct 3	styles and preferences		Horan et al (2015)
7	Oct 8	Affection & immediacy		GAA Ch 7
	Oct 10	<i>Enjoy fall recess—no class meeting</i>		
8	Oct 15	Relational maintenance		GAA Ch 10
	Oct 17	and social support	Paper due by Oct 18 at 11:59 pm	tbd
9	Oct 22	Communicating about sex	topic ideas due	Goodboy et al. 2010 Kelly, Duran & Miller-Ott 2017 GAA Ch 9
	Oct 24	& sexual health		
10	Oct 29	Conflict	prelim sources due	GAA Ch 11 Aloia & Solomon (2015) Merrill & Afifi (2017)
	Oct 31	Deception	Quiz	GAA Ch 13 Elphinston et al. (2013) Markovitz & Hancock (2018)
11	Nov 5	Presentations	Presentations/ Peer feedback	
	Nov 7	Presentations	Peer feedback	
12	Nov 12	Presentations	Peer feedback	
	Nov 14	Presentations	Peer feedback	
13	Nov 19	Healing & apologizing		GAA Ch 14
	Nov 21	(cont.)	Reading response 3	Carr et al. (2015)

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Week	Date	Topic	Assignment due before class	Readings for after class
14	Nov 26	Power		GAA Ch 12
	Nov 28	<i>Thanksgiving—no class meeting</i>		
15	Dec 3	Influence		tbd
	Dec 5	Course conclusion		
	Dec xx	Final exam xxx		

Please note the date of the final exam is set by USC. The university requires we hold the final during that time period.

Course Policies

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. We can't truly understand another person's perspective, but 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. While it is normal to miss a few times during the course of a semester, you cannot "take" this class without attending regularly.

2. Of course you may occasionally have to miss class for illness or other reasons. When you are absent, I do not need to hear an excuse. I do not take attendance after the first few weeks of class. 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.

No laptops or electronics.

In order to create the best possible learning environment, I ask you to not use your laptops 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.)

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.

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Communication

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

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: 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 as soon as possible if something prevents you from submitting your work on time.

Accidentally uploading the wrong assignment or using a format not accepted by Brightspace is not an excuse for a late submission.

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 you have trouble with Brightspace, reach out to Brightspace support directly for help—service is available 24/7 at 213-740-5555. Brightspace submissions that have uploaded successfully automatically generate an email to the student who submitted them. If you don't get the email, you haven't submitted your assignment.

If Brightspace has a problem, you may email your assignment 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.

Please keep in mind that generative AI is a tool which offers opportunities and raises concerns. 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 notes when using generative AI:

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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.

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:

I believe a “B” represents really good work. An “A” represents excellent work. A “C” grade should satisfactorily meet all the requirements of an assignment. To achieve a “C” or better on written assignments, you must write at a level appropriate for a university student, i.e., with clarity and with correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Consider connecting with USC’s Writing Center early in the semester for help with your writing. 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.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Homework & in-class work	10%
Podcast discussion	15%
Comm analysis paper	20%
Investigation mini-lecture	20%
Quizzes	20%
Final exploration	15%

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.

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- 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 or exams regardless of your average score in the class.

Assignments

Much more information will be forthcoming and posted on Brightspace. These brief descriptions are just to give you an idea of what to expect.

Homework & In-Class Work (10%)

You will get credit for short, independent assignments and possibly some in-class participation activities. These will include:

Student Introduction Sheet: complete this so I have some info about you

Identity Exploration

Create a collage (digital, on paper, or as a video) that represents a number of elements of your identity. Be prepared to share these in class (and edit your work with your own privacy needs in mind).

Practice quiz

Topic selection for comm analysis paper

Topic selection for investigation presentation

Peer feedback/questions on presentations

Reading responses

Podcast Discussion (15%)

Listen to a podcast related to our course topics (subject to my approval). In class, you will synopsise it for us, demonstrate how the content is or is not supported by research, and bring three discussion questions.

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Comm Analysis Paper (20%)

You will write a 5-7 page paper that demonstrates your understanding and application of course concepts.

This assignment asks you to apply the *concepts* you've learned about interpersonal communication to *examples* of interpersonal communication you observe in a work of fiction *or* based on an interview you conduct with relational partners.

Investigation Mini-Lecture (20%)

This will be an opportunity to investigate an interpersonal comm topic that interests you and share it with the class.

Quizzes (20%)

The quizzes assess if you are able to apply what you have learned through class meetings and readings. Prepare for a series of rigorous multiple choice questions on the quizzes. If you know yourself to be someone finds these kinds of tests particularly challenging, check my posts on Brightspace and seek help early in the semester.

Please note that you are responsible for both the material presented in the readings and in class. The two do not always overlap. If you miss a class, be sure to connect with a couple of your peers to get notes. If you need clarification after getting notes, please come to me with your questions.

Final Exploration (15%)

We will decide an appropriate summative experience for the class: perhaps a lit review, a video, or a podcast episode. This will be due on the date of the final set by the university.

Campus Resources

Please take advantage of some of the resources your tuition supports. Early in the semester, visit 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 as well as the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneno, and Luiseno People. I would like to acknowledge the unjust, violent history that unfolded over many years before the establishment of this university, and to show appreciation and humility toward indigenous communities and the sacrifices they were—and continue to be—forced to make.

Looking Ahead

Studying communication is an ongoing experience of discovery. I look forward to learning more with all of you this semester.

Statement on Academic Conduct

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

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intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty 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).

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[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.