COMG 781: Seminar in Relational Communication
“Communication technology in Human Relationships”
Spring 2013
Section 001: Tu 3:00 – 5:30 p.m., George Hall 335

Instructor: Bobby Tokunaga
Office: George Hall 316
Office Hours: T/Th 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces you to many of the prevailing theories related to the influence of communication technologies on interpersonal relationships. Although the course largely focuses on romantic relationship formation and maintenance in Internet-based communication, we also focus on other modes of communication and various relationship types. We begin this course with a broad discussion that situates research on communication technologies in the larger study of human communication. We then narrow the scope of the discussion to topics involving the “bright side” relational communication on the Internet, including impression management, relational development, and maintenance. The course ends by focusing on different types of antisocial, disinhibited messages that can be carried through technologies.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this course, you should be able to:
• discuss whether the area of communication technologies should be considered its own subdiscipline in the communication field;
• identify differences between in-person and online communication;
• talk about the structural and functional characteristics of online communication;
• recognize ways communication technologies augment human relationships;
• see ways communication technologies negatively influence human relationships.

COURSE TEXT


Supplemental articles will be made available through our course website.

COURSE WEBSITE

You are expected to be familiar with Laulima (http://laulima.hawaii.edu/) for access to the course website. The website will provide you with the latest announcements and readings. You are expected to check the Laulima website regularly. You must log in using your University of Hawai‘i username and password.
**SEMINAR IN RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION**

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Format:** This graduate-level course is designated as a seminar. The instructor will provide a cursory overview of the topic at the beginning of the class, but the discussions will be largely led by students. You are thus expected to read the chapters of the text and journal articles assigned for each week carefully. You should not attend classes if you neglected to read because it will waste your time and the time of your fellow classmates. You should be prepared to make thoughtful contributions to the discussion and raise any conceptual or methodological questions.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory for this graduate-level course. Accruing more than one unexcused absence will result in the loss of ten (10) points from your final grade for each absence. You are responsible for all information covered in the classes you miss. Please contact me if some unforeseen situation arises wherein you are unable to attend class.

**Late Work Policy:** Absolutely NO late work will be accepted unless you have some documented circumstance that prohibits you from submitting the work. You should notify the instructor immediately when such circumstances occur and either an alternative assignment or extension will be given to you. If you are participating in a university-affiliated activity, you must make arrangements with the instructor prior to your absence.

**Academic Integrity:** Any student caught plagiarizing an assignment will be immediately reported to the Director of Graduate Studies and Chairperson of the Communicology Department and will receive a failing grade on the assignment. Plagiarism includes the lack of acknowledgement for another person’s original thoughts or writings, copying of another’s work verbatim without the use of quotation marks and citation of the source, the use of a person or agency in the business of selling term papers, and the submission of a paper written for another class without the permission of both instructors.

University of Hawai’i’s Student Conduct Code covers these and other infractions in greater depth. You are expected to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, which can be found at http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code/.

**E-mail Use:** You are responsible for checking your e-mail account frequently and consistently to remain current with University communications. You are expected to monitor and manage your e-mail storage quota to ensure that their mailboxes are not saturated, and you are able to receive new messages. Please check your e-mail every day to keep up to date on important correspondence related to this course.

**Grade Appeals Policy:** Any grade in the class is able to be appealed if you believe there is a compelling reason why you should have received a higher grade. You are responsible for preparing a type-written argument, which may be e-mailed, detailing why you feel a higher grade is deserved. To appeal a grade received on an assignment, you are asked to provide all of the necessary documentation with the written argument (e.g., paper with instructor’s comments, etc.). All appeals must be submitted within one week of receiving the grade.

The instructor will review grade appeals and determine whether any points should be granted. If no amicable solution can be met after the first grade appeal, you may file a secondary grade appeal. For such appeals, an independent graduate faculty member will regrade the assignment, using the assignment rubric, and issue a grade. The second grade, whether it is higher or lower than the original, will be recorded and is not able to be appealed.
Discussion Leader (150 points; 30% of your grade): You will be responsible for leading the discussion for one week. You are responsible for creating five to six discussion questions about the collection of articles assigned for that week. Good discussion questions are not exceedingly broad so they lack direction; likewise, discussion questions should not exist at such a narrow level of abstraction that few responses can be generated. You must first get instructor approval of your questions and then send the questions to your fellow classmates by no later than the Friday preceding your discussion week. This will give your classmates adequate time to prepare responses. You are not required to prepare outlines or a visual aid. You will begin the class with a brief (no more than 5 minutes) overview of the week’s theme and introduce the first prompt. You are responsible for leading the discussion although the instructor will offer additional insights to comments and pose relevant questions to the class when appropriate.

At the end of the discussion, the leader is responsible for devising and articulating a hypothetical quantitative study (i.e., experimental, longitudinal, or cross-sectional survey) that moves literature on the phenomenon forward. Please provide a handout of information related to the study that includes a conceptual map of the study and sample items from the measurement scales you would employ. You may adapt items for measures if they are unavailable but be systematic when modifying items; that is, do not arbitrarily make up items unless it is otherwise unavoidable.

Article Critique Presentation (50 points; 10% of your grade): Each week, one student will be responsible for finding an empirical, peer-reviewed article in a communication journal that relates to the week’s theme. He or she will send this article to all students by the Friday before the class period. During the last 30 minutes of class, the student will critique the article for a 10 to 15-minute period, and we will then open the discussion to all members of the class. The presenter may pose questions to classmates during this discussion period. A successful presentation will identify problems in the investigation with the application of theory, conceptualization, methods, instruments, and interpretation of results. You do not need to identify all the problems with the study; just select the main issues that might weaken the contribution of the investigation to our understanding of the phenomenon under discussion.

Article Critique Paper (50 points; 10% of your grade): The article critique presentation must be accompanied by a 6 to 8 page paper. This critique will be more exhaustive than the presentation, reviewing all the substantive issues with the study. The goal of this paper is to prepare you for being a peer reviewer of a journal. In the paper, you will identify conceptual, methodological, measurement, statistical, and interpretation issues with the article. You may also praise strengths of the article in the paper. For the method critique, you should mention pertinent internal and external validity threats. You will need to revisit the actual scales for the measurement critique and suggest areas of improvement based on scale reliability and validity threats. The paper is due at the beginning of class on the day you present. Please feel free to meet with the instructor for additional guidance on this paper.

Participation (50 points; 10% of your grade): The seminar format relies on your preparation to respond thoughtfully to the discussions and questions raised in class. A rich discussion can only emerge if you carefully read and understand the articles. Your participation grade in this course reflects the quantity and quality of your contribution to the discussion. Speaking frequently but with very little substance will not earn you maximum points. The instructor reserves the right to include quizzes each week if he finds that students are not reading each week. The grades for these quizzes will take the place of the participation grade.
Research Study (200 points; 40% of your grade): The most substantive project in this class is the final paper and presentation. The prospective goal of this paper is to submit it to an academic conference. You will be assigned to a group of 3 or 4 members. Your group will be responsible for designing and conducting an empirical investigation that involves communication and technology in some way. You have some latitude in designing the study, but one condition of this project is that you must invoke or meaningfully test part or all of a communication theory. You may elect to do a cross-sectional survey, longitudinal survey, experimental study, or quantitative content analysis. Your group will be graded on the sophistication of your design; that is, cross-sectional survey studies will be graded more critically on choice of measures, sampling, hypotheses, application of theory, and appropriateness of statistical analyses than experimental or longitudinal designs. Experimental studies are considered more labor intensive and will be evaluated on the quality of the manipulation and imperviousness of the results to validity threats. An objective of this study is to extend theory or apply theory to a novel context such that a new understanding emerges of the phenomenon under investigation. Because you are responsible for organizing an actual study, you must obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of your study methods from the UH Human Studies Program (HSP) (http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/) before any collecting data.

Your final paper will be approximately 20 to 25 pages in length (not including references, tables, figures, and end notes). You must organize your paper using the writing style prescribed by the APA 5th or 6th edition. Your paper should include an introduction, review of literature, explicit hypotheses, method section, results section, and discussion section. Further instructions about what is expected in each section will be provided to you in a separate document. Different parts of the paper are due at different time periods. You are expected to turn in the final paper, responding to instructor comments from earlier “drafts.” The following deadlines must be met; failure to meet these deadlines will result in significant point penalties:

1. January 29: A two-page paper that reviews the theory you want to invoke, preliminary hypotheses on the extension, and an overview of the methods you want to use to test the hypotheses.

2. February 19: You must complete all applicable IRB paperwork. You can find the forms at the UH HSP website (http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/forms.php). All members of the group must also complete the CITI training program (http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/training_citi_howto.php) if you have not done so already. Completing this program now will be useful for conducting future research projects (e.g., Master’s thesis). You must have the modules completed and your certification in hand before you submit the IRB forms. The items for all measures, consent form, and disclosure form must accompany your IRB paperwork. The instructor must review all documents before you submit them.

3. March 19: A prospectus that includes only the introduction, literature review, and hypotheses. The prospectus should be approximately 8 to 12 pages. Enough background should be included in the paper to give the reader a good idea of the relevant literature leading to the hypotheses.

4. Date TBD: The method and results section of your paper will be reviewed before the final submission of your entire manuscript. This deadline will depend on the timeliness of IRB approval and participant recruitment. You will submit this part of your paper soon after data collection is complete. Expect the deadline to be in mid-April.
5. **April 30:** Presentation. Groups must prepare a 20-minute conference style presentation, which includes a visual aid. The group should present all the components of the paper, including the literature review, hypotheses, method, results, and discussion. Group members must have equivalent speaking roles. A 10-minute question-and-answer period, on which groups will also be evaluated, will follow the presentation. Questions will be raised by classmates and the instructor.

6. **May 3:** Final paper submission. The final paper must include the revised literature review, method section, and results section. A discussion section should also be included in this paper. A title page and abstract of no more than 150 words should accompany the manuscript. Neither the title page nor the abstract page count toward the page limit; the paper should not exceed 30 pages in length.

Submission Procedures: All papers must be submitted in the “Assignments” section on Laulima by the start of the respective class. Please name the file as the capitalized last name of all group members and nothing else. If you are using Windows Office 2000 or a more recent version, please save the MS Word document as a .doc extension as opposed to the default .docx extension (e.g., Tokunaga, Kim, & Aune.doc, not TokunagaPaper1.docx). Do not submit the document in any other format (e.g., .pages, .pdf, etc.). Absolutely no late papers will be accepted. You should expect to receive instructor feedback through the track changes and comments functions on MS Word. The instructor will upload papers to Laulima once they have been reviewed.
The following is a tentative schedule for each class period. Changes may need to be made to this schedule. You are responsible for making the changes on their syllabus.

**January 8**  
Overview of the Influence of Communication Technology on Human Relationships

**January 15**  
How to Frame Communication Technologies in the Current Social Climate


**January 22**  
Role of Technologies in People’s Lives


**January 29**  
Cues Filtered Out


February 5  Social Information Processing Theory


February 12  Hyperpersonal Communication


February 19  Impression Management I: Editing Self on Interpersonal Relationships


February 26  Impression Management II: Identification Markers in Virtual Communities


March 5  Seeking Information on Others


**March 12**  
**Relational Maintenance Behaviors on the Internet**


**March 19**  
**Relationship Formation and Maintenance in Virtual Communities**


**March 26**  
**Spring Break (No class)**
April 2    Deception Online


April 9    Flaming Internet Abusive Messages


April 16    Online Relational Intrusions, Cyberstalking, and Cyberbullying


April 23 Psychological and Relational Influences of Deficient Self-Regulation


### SEMINAR IN RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION
POINT BREAKDOWN (Continued)

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<th>LETTER GRADE</th>
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<td>A+</td>
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<td>485 – 500</td>
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### What a Grade Means

- **A**: Exceptional work; Far exceeds minimum requirements for the assignment; Demonstrated mastery over subject area; Very few technical issues
- **B+**: Above average work; Exceeds minimum requirements; Demonstrated competency in subject area; Some technical problems but not distracting
- **B**: Average work; Meets the minimum requirements for the assignment; Demonstrated superficial knowledge in subject area; Technical issues apparent.
- **C+**: Below average work; Does not meet minimum requirements; Does not appear to understand assignment; Did not seek help when necessary
- **C**: Poor quality work; Appeared to submit work haphazardly; Did not put in appropriate effort; No support in assignment; Many technical issues