CMST 7910: Seminar in Interpersonal Communication Theory
Communication, Message Interpretation, and the Self
Fall, 2013
T 3:00-5:50, 120 Prescott

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 10:30-11:30, or whenever I am in my office

Course Description

In the preface to their 1998 book, Communication and Personality: Trait Perspectives, McCroskey, Daly, Martin, and Beatty wrote, “As researchers of the communication process, we are interested in why people differ in how they communicate. We are also very interested in why individuals differ in how they perceive and assign meaning to messages” (p. vii). Although this sentiment is 15 years old, it resonates with current research in our field. Recent articles in communication journals include studies that incorporate

1. individual differences (e.g., gender, culture, emotional intelligence, attachment style, empathy);
2. issues relevant to self (e.g., self-affirmation, including the other in the self, feelings of personal success); and
3. meaning (marriage as an ideograph; perceptions of public service announcements; making sense of growing up with a disability; perceptions of nonverbal immediacy).

Our goal will be to examine these constructs and explore the connections among them. The objectives of the seminar are as follows:

1. Acquaint the students with concepts in communication research that relate to individual differences, self, and meaning;
2. Explore the relationships among them; and
3. Develop student interest and expertise in conducting empirical research on message interpretation.

Text: Readings will be assigned from a variety of edited books and journals.

Graded activities and assignments:

1. You will lead the discussion for one or two topics. 10%
2. Article responses: For 5 topics, you will find and write a report on one article in addition to the assigned readings. In your response, you should summarize the article (up to 1 single-spaced page) and discuss it (up to 1 single-spaced page). Your discussion should highlight important issues, relate the article to other readings, identify directions for
additional research, critique the article, and/or provide another perspective on the topic. 10%
3. Research paper. 30%
4. Exam. 25%
5. Participation. 25%

Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office of Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations can be arranged. After you receive the accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations.

August 27   Introduction to the class and each other. Message interpretation. Individual differences.

Sept. 3   Meaning/content and relational meaning/relational communication/framing theory/denotation and connotation/ambiguity and vagueness.


Sept. 17   Self: Theories and approaches.

Sept. 24   Self: More theories and approaches.


For the next five weeks, we will consider a variety of communicator characteristics such as communication apprehension, sex and gender, argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness, and communication competence (one or two characteristics per class meeting). We will decide which constructs to examine based in part on the interests of the students in the seminar.

Oct. 8   Individual differences.

Oct. 15   Individual differences.

Oct. 22   Individual differences

Oct. 29   Individual differences.

Nov. 5   Individual differences.

Nov. 12   Individual differences.

Nov. 19   Connecting the dots.
Nov. 26 Papers Due. Paper Presentations (10-15 minutes each).

Dec. 3 Paper Presentations, continued.

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 10, 5:30-7:30