

# Communication 280: Theorizing Communication



## Contact Information

Instructor: Bill Kirkpatrick  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:00-5:00; Wednesdays, 1:30-3:30; or by appointment  
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## Course Summary and Learning Goals

This course introduces students to selected theoretical perspectives and vocabularies for understanding human communication. It is designed to provide an overview of the discipline of Communication and prepare Communication majors and minors for future work at Denison.

By the end of this class, you should:

- have a solid understanding of the *constitutive approach to communication* and the political, social, cultural, and interpersonal consequences of understanding communication as constitutive.
- have a working grasp of important concepts that relate to the constitutive approach to communication, including *representation, identity, power, discourse, subjectivity, and social construction*.
- be able to *think critically* about how you participate in a range of communication processes, and how the concepts discussed in class shape and influence that participation.
- gain a basic understanding of *the discipline of Communication and its history* and be able to describe how the Communication Department at Denison operates within the mission of the liberal arts.
- grasp *the nature of theory* in the field of Communication; improve your ability to read, comprehend, and apply challenging theoretical texts; and be prepared, in later classes, to encounter a wide range of communication theories and apply them to your own research.

## Required Texts (available in the Denison Bookstore)

- Communication 280 Reading Packet
- John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (3rd Ed. preferred)

## Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Midterm (3/13)	20%	Reading Notes (DERNs)	20%
Theory Assignment (4/25)	20%	Class Engagement	10%
Final Exam (5/9)	25%	Community Engagement	5%

## Grade Scale

A	=	93 - 100%	C	=	73 - 76.9%
A-	=	90 - 92.9%	C-	=	70 - 72.9%
B+	=	87 - 89.9%	D+	=	67 - 69.9%
B	=	83 - 86.9%	D	=	63 - 66.9%
B-	=	80 - 82.9%	D-	=	60 - 62.9%
C+	=	77 - 79.9%	F	=	0-59.9%

## Policies and Expectations

You and Me: I strongly encourage you to come to office hours, if only to introduce yourself more fully—I love getting to know students better. Furthermore, I am committed to making our class and the Denison community a respectful and inclusive environment; if I could do be doing better in this respect, I am grateful to learn from you.

Attendance: Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of the course as well as your own personal achievement. I will be taking attendance daily, and missing class or failing to participate constructively will definitely impact your class engagement grade. You are responsible for all class content from days that you have missed.

Lateness: Be in your seat and ready to begin class at the scheduled start time. Do not come in late without a valid, unavoidable reason.

Engagement: The primary responsibility for creating a productive and enjoyable class rests with you. Your active engagement affects not only what you but also what your classmates get out of the course. Merely attending and taking notes will not be enough to do well in this course.

Preparation: Always bring that day's readings to class with you—failure to do so will result in your being dismissed from class and counted as absent for the day.

The syllabus will always state clearly what you should read prior to each class, which assignments you should hand in, etc. Late assignments will be penalized by a half-grade for each 24 hours of lateness (e.g. from B+ to B). If you know that you will have difficulty completing an assignment on time, let me know before the deadline and I will try to work with you if possible.

Written Work: Except as otherwise indicated, all written work must be typed (double-spaced), spellchecked, and proofread. Failure to run your work through a spellchecker (one more time before printing is a good idea) will automatically result in the equivalent of a letter-grade deduction on that assignment. Multi-page documents must be stapled—I will not accept unstapled work. See also "Gateway Criteria for Written Work" on p. 4 of this syllabus.

Grades: All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. The calculation of your grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale, and the weight of each assignment is listed above. If you are concerned about your grade, come talk to me as early as possible. Late assignments will be penalized a half-grade per day (e.g. B+ to B).

In-Class Behavior: You may not eat in class (beverages are okay). You may not leave class except in actual emergency situations—no casual trips to the restroom or water fountain.

Electronics: You may not use computers/tablets/phones in class without prior approval. Your phone must be turned off and put away during class. If you absolutely must have your phone on for some reason, talk to me at the beginning of the semester or the particular class session.

Email Policy: I use email to send out announcements, changes in the syllabus, reminders about due dates, etc. It is your responsibility to check your email/Notebowl regularly to keep up-to-date with these announcements. During normal class weeks I promise to answer all time-sensitive email from students within 24 hours (36 hours on weekends) and will hold you responsible for any announcements made via email within 24 hours of the announced change (36 hours on weekends).

Accessibility and Special Accommodations: It is important that the course be accessible to all students. If you need any alternative accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation materials and procedures in order to participate fully in the course, or if there are any external issues that may affect your work in this course, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific situation.

Academic Honesty: You may not turn in substantially similar work in two classes without the express consent of both instructors. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated: do your own work and cite all of your sources correctly. You are encouraged to use the resources available in the library system and the Writing Center to guide your research. In addition, I call your attention to Denison's statement on academic integrity:

"Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty, and it requires that cases be heard by the Academic Integrity Board. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which integrity is violated.

"Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly.

"For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity see <http://www.denison.edu/about/integrity.html>."

## Gateway Criteria for Written Work

Below are the bare minimum requirements of professionalism for all written work you turn in, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the assignment prompt. If any of these criteria are not met, I will stop reading and give you a zero on the assignment. Depending on the assignment, you *might* be able to revise your work to meet the gateway criteria and hand it back in, at which point a grade penalty will be assessed; if that option is available to you, it will be spelled out in the assignment prompt.

1. The work must be typed in twelve-point font, with one-inch margins on all sides, and double-spaced.
2. Your name and the date of completion must be given at the top.
3. If work is printed out and more than one page, it must be stapled. Please note that paper clips and dog-ears are *not* staples.
4. All citations must be in Chicago full-footnote/bibliography style unless otherwise specified (or you make other arrangements with me).
5. The version that you turn in must have been properly spell-checked.
6. The work must adhere to any word counts or page counts given in the prompt unless otherwise authorized.
7. All titles of media works must be formatted as follows: italicize titles of books, plays, films, albums, magazines, journals, newspapers, and TV programs; use quotation marks around titles of individual articles, songs, poems, chapter titles, short stories, and TV series episodes.

Example: In a *New York Times* article entitled "Heels on the Ground," the author analyzes the song "Formation" from Beyoncé's album *Lemonade*.



## Reading Notes (DERNs)

Twelve times over the semester, I will collect your reading notes. This has several purposes, including helping you engage effectively with the reading and gauging how well students are understanding the material. This also helps foster good class discussion: as you know from experience, the best classes happen when students are well prepared, having completed and thought about the reading. With that in mind:

- For each day's reading, please use a specific note-taking method called "Double-Entry Reading Notes" (DERNs). A separate handout will explain how to take notes in this style.
- Between Jan. 30 and Mar. 6, you must turn in a total of six DERNs; between Mar. 8 and May 1, you must turn in six additional DERNs. This gives you a great deal of flexibility and autonomy to manage your workload: you may choose for which readings you want to hand in DERNs (but please pay attention: some days are marked "— no DERN"; those are readings that don't lend themselves to DERNs and you should not hand any in on that day). You may not make up missed DERNs.
- DERNs will be collected at the end of each class period. You may not turn in your notes after that point: no exceptions, period. If I don't have them by the time I walk out of the room after class, then you will not receive credit for them.
- You may make the notes as long and detailed as you wish, but they should be clearly organized in the DERN format. Most readings can be summarized effectively in two single-spaced pages.
- The daily notes do not need to be typed but they must be legible; I reserve the right to insist that your notes be typed if I cannot read your handwriting. Gateway criteria do not apply, but multi-page notes must be stapled. I will give only minimal feedback on these "daily DERNs," but I will skim through them and grade them as ✓+, ✓, ✓-, or 0 (if they are done so poorly that they don't reflect minimal acceptable engagement with the reading, or if they are on the wrong reading). Cumulatively these will be worth 10% of your final grade, with each ✓+ worth 9 points, each ✓ worth 6 points, and each ✓- worth 3 points.
- Daily DERNs will be graded primarily on your demonstrated effort to comprehend, synthesize, and apply the reading. To do well, you should summarize the authors' points in your own words (do not simply quote their words) and then seek to apply or extend those ideas to your own examples, connect them to other readings, or challenge them using your own reasoning.
- **Polished DERNs:** On Mar. 8 and May 3, you should turn in revised and expanded notes on a previous reading of your choice. In other words, take what you consider your most promising DERN thus far, revise and extend it, and then hand it in together with the original DERN that has my comments on it. This polished DERN must be typed and should be three-six pages single-spaced; spacing aside, gateway criteria apply.
- These polished DERNs will be graded primarily on 1). your ability to identify the main points of the reading, then coherently and correctly summarize those points in your own words; 2). the thoughtfulness and creativity with which you respond to the material and apply it to your own examples; 3). your ability to forge connections between this reading and other readings and class discussions; and 4). your ability to revise effectively. Each polished DERN will be worth 50 points, or 5% of your final grade.
- See the separate handout for more information on completing the DERNs.

## Daily Schedule

Except for Fiske, most readings are in the course reading packet; readings not in the packet will be available on Notebowl (marked "NB"). Readings should be completed by that day's class, and you should come prepared to discuss them. You *must* bring each day's reading to class, including your own printout of readings on Notebowl.

Every single thing on this syllabus is subject to change, so check your email or Notebowl for announcements of changes and keep on your toes.

### UNIT 1 – INTRODUCTION TO CONSTITUTIVE COMMUNICATION

Jan. 23	Communication is Constitutive		
Jan. 25	The Power in the Story	<u>Read:</u>	Hennessy, "The Interpretive Value of Different Perspectives" Vuolo, "What Happens When a Language Has No Numbers?" (NB) Deutscher, "Does Your Language Shape How You Think?" (NB) Luhmann, "How Culture Shapes Our Senses" (NB) Bosmajian, "The Language of Oppression"
Jan. 30	The Transmission Model	<u>Read:</u>	Fiske, pp. 1-21 ("Introduction" and "Communication Theory")
Feb. 1	Encoding/Decoding I	<u>Read:</u>	Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
Feb. 6	Encoding/Decoding II	<u>Read:</u>	Chandler, "Encoding/Decoding" (NB) — <i>no DERN</i>
Feb. 8	Introduction to Semiotics I	<u>Read:</u>	Fiske, "Communication, Meaning, and Signs"
Feb. 13	Introduction to Semiotics II	<u>Read:</u>	Fiske, "Signification"
Feb. 15	Myth	<u>Read:</u>	Chandler, "Denotation, Connotation, Myth" (NB)
Feb. 20	Consolidation and Practice	<u>Read:</u>	Mandell & Martin, "Honor in the Face of Shame"
Feb. 22	Ideology	<u>Read:</u>	Hebdige, "From Culture to Hegemony"
Feb. 27	Hegemony	<u>Read:</u>	Fiske, "Ideology and Meanings"
Mar. 1	Discourse and Power I	<u>Read:</u>	Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge"
Mar. 6	Discourse and Power II	<u>Read:</u>	Stoddart, "Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse"
Mar. 8	Consolidation and Practice	<u>Read:</u> <u>Turn in:</u>	Kumar, "A River By Any Other Name" Polished DERN 1

Mar. 13 Midterm

Mar. 15 **NO CLASS: BILL AT A CONFERENCE**

----- **SPRING BREAK: MAR. 19-23** -----

**UNIT 2 – THE POLITICS OF CONSTITUTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Mar. 27 Power and the Subject Read: Foucault, "Panopticism" (NB)  
Turn In: Theory assignment bibliography by 5:00 p.m.

Mar. 29 The Social Construction of Race I Read: Omi & Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (excerpt)

Apr. 3 The Social Construction of Race II Read: McIntosh, "White Privilege"  
Neo-Prodigy, "10 Conversations"  
hooks, "Eating the Other"

Apr. 5 The Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality I Read: Brickell, "Performativity or Performance?"

Apr. 10 The Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality II Read: Fausto-Sterling, "Dualing Dualisms"

Apr. 12 The Social Construction of Class Read: Powercube, "Pierre Bourdieu" (NB)  
Wilson, "Let's Talk About Bad Taste" (NB)  
— *no DERN*

Apr. 17 **NO CLASS/OFFICE HOURS: BILL AT A CONFERENCE**

Apr. 19 Consolidation and Practice Read: Ibrahim, "Becoming Black" (NB)

**UNIT 3 – INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION AT DENISON**

Apr. 24 Relational Communication Read: Russell, "Creating Meaning From Chaos"  
Turn In: Theory assignment by **5:00 p.m., Wed., Apr. 25**

Apr. 26 Rhetoric Read: Haliliuc, "Who is a Victim of Communism?" (NB)

May 1 Media and Representation Read: Griffin, "The Aesthetics of Banality" (NB)

May 3 Summary and review Turn In: Polished DERN 2

**FINAL EXAM:**

SEC. 01: WEDNESDAY, 5/9, 2:00 - 4:00 P.M.

SEC. 02: WEDNESDAY, 5/9, 6:30 - 8:30 P.M.

STUDENTS MAY REQUEST TO TAKE THEIR FINAL EXAM WITH THE OTHER SECTION

PROVISIONAL/PARTIAL LIST OF KEY TERMS FOR THE SEMESTER

Representation/Identity/Power	Dialectic (ex. slave-master)
Ontology	Structure vs. Agency
Discourse	Social construction of race: race, racial formation, racial projects
Subjectivity/subject formation	White privilege
Power, social power, discursive power	Alterity, otherness, the Other
"Everything is an argument"	Social construction of gender
Truth, truth effects	Sex vs. gender
Transmission/Process Model of Communication	Heteronormativity/homonormativity
Sender-message-receiver	Performativity, performance
Code, channel, noise, feedback	Erving Goffman, Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu
Instrumental/strategic communications	Social construction of class/ social reproduction of class
Encoding/Decoding	Social capital, cultural capital, economic capital
Preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings	Habitus
Circuit of communication	Social Imaginary
Semiotics (Peirce, Saussure, Barthes)	Standpoint theory
Signifier-signified-referent (or object)	Ethnography
Symbolic, indexical, symbolic signifiers	Autoethnography
Paradigm, syntagm	Narrative
Denotation, connotation, myth	Epistemology
Metonym, metaphor	Phenomenology
Binary oppositions	Texts-Industries-Social Context- Audiences (TISCA)
Marked/unmarked bodies	Affect, affective investment
Definitions of culture	"Communication is constitutive"
Hegemony	_____
Consent	_____
Common sense	_____
Ideological struggle, discursive struggle	_____
Ideology	_____
Base-superstructure, Marxist analysis	_____
False consciousness	_____
Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)	_____
Interpellation	_____
Discursive construction of reality	_____
Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault	_____
Power/Knowledge	_____
The Panopticon/panopticism	_____
Theory (as used in the Communication Department)	_____
Rhetoric, Relational Communication, Media Studies	_____