



**SCHOOL OF
COMMUNICATION**
Illinois State University

COM 111-004

Introduction to Communication Theories

Fall 2026

Classroom: Fell Hall 158

Dates & Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 9:00 – 9:50 a.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment, MW 12–1 p.m. & M 2–3 p.m. Any time via cell phone.

Course Description and Objectives:

According to the undergraduate catalog, COM 111: “Introduces the student to numerous basic communication theories and underlying assumptions of theory building.” The purpose is to provide students with a solid grounding in theories communication scholars apply to contemporary communication challenges, metatheoretical perspectives, theory building and evaluation, basic and applied theoretical research, debates within communication, and communication content area theories. The course is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop students’ abilities to articulate a range of communication theories and processes across disciplinary contexts including communication studies, journalism, mass media, and public relations.
2. Provide students with the ability to analyze the metatheoretical assumptions and implications of communication theories.
3. Develop students’ competencies in evaluating the heuristic value and limitations of communication theory in personal, social, and professional contexts.
4. Develop students’ abilities to construct practical solutions to social problems using communication theories as frameworks for problem-solving.

Online Engagement:

We may have unplanned Zoom days, so also check ISU Canvas announcements and your ISU email. Consult the Modules feature in ISU Canvas for tasks to complete. Cognella’s Active Learning platform is a separate Canvas site (yes, *we use two Canvas sites: the one ISU hosts as well as one Cognella hosts*), so use it daily for required active learning tasks related to textbook readings. Contact me through my ISU email (for quick questions) or my cell phone (for back-and-forth dialogue). I do *not* check or respond to Canvas inbox messages.

Professionalism:

Be prepared for class by completing readings and *finishing Active Learning tasks before we discuss the chapters in class*. Learning is maximized by reading, handwritten note-taking, critical listening, cognitive engagement, and focusing one’s attention by not yielding to distractions. Actively listen to speakers during lectures and discussion. We are a team working collectively to improve and learn theory, working together in a spirit of cooperation. Each student must be a productive, contributing member of our team. Be on time for class, ignore cell phones, text

messages, social media, or urges to surf the Internet. Respect is demonstrated by listening, ignoring distractions, and being fully present—both physically and mentally. *Laptops, tablets, and phones should not be used during class without my explicit permission.* Audio or video recording/translation and photography are not permitted without approved SAAS accommodations.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance and active engagement are required. Attend classes prepared to discuss and engage with the daily readings. Perfect attendance is expected; by enrolling in this course, you have made a commitment to be present during all class meetings. Absences deprive you of valuable class lectures, discussions, and announcements. When you are absent you will miss a ton of material. There is a strong connection between absences and grades; the more classes students miss, the lower grades they tend to earn.

Late Work Policy:

If you do not take an exam during the scheduled time, you will likely receive a zero. Active Learning tasks are due on the days we read the related chapters. An automatic 10% of the points possible will be deducted from late submissions, with an additional 10% deducted for each 24 hours it is late. However, there are final cutoffs for Active Learning prior to the exams, after which late work is not accepted. As a general rule, incomplete grades will not be given.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

Students must be honest in all academic work, consistent with the *Code of Student Conduct*. All ideas must be appropriately cited when borrowed, directly or indirectly, from a source. Inadequate citation, unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration, and/or the presentation of someone else's work constitute plagiarism. Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty (including cheating on an exam, falsifying evidence, recycling work submitted for another course, or plagiarizing an assignment) will likely receive a failing assignment and course grade as well as be referred for disciplinary action to the Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities office. Reporting academic dishonesty is my professional responsibility so I do not hesitate to enforce consequences. In this course, the use of generative AI tools is not permitted to support the completion of any assignment in whole or in part and constitutes academic dishonesty. This includes, but is not limited to, using generative AI tools to ideate, pre-plan, edit, translate, or otherwise create original material you claim to be solely your creation.

Special Needs Accommodation:

I will happily accommodate any special needs you have—so please let me know, though I require written documentation from Student Access and Accommodation Services for ongoing accommodations. Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact SAAS at 308 Fell Hall, office phone (309) 438-5853, video phone (309) 319-7682 or visit StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Research Board Participation:

See: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/>. Don't wait to get started. Participate in a study to earn points or write a 3-page journal article review instead (a sample is provided on Canvas).

Course Assignments and Grades:

The grading scale is as follows: A= 100-90%; B= 89-80%; C= 79-70%; D= 69-60%; F= 59% and below. Percentages will be calculated based on points earned from:

	<u>Points Possible/Your Points</u>	
<u>Examinations</u>		
First Examination	100	/ _____
Second Examination	100	/ _____
Final Examination	100	/ _____
<u>Assignments</u>		
Active Learning Site	200	/ _____
Theory Project	50	/ _____
Research Board Participation	10	/ _____
Total	560	/ _____

Examinations:

Exams are closed book/closed notes. Questions are objective style (e.g., multiple choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the blank) as well as short answer/short essay. The final exam is comprehensive, while other exams address only readings covered in prior weeks.

Theory Project:

You will research a theory I approve, applying it to a contemporary communication challenge (e.g., abortion rights, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, threats to voting rights, social media misinformation and conspiracy theories, climate change). The final product will involve writing a 3-5 page executive summary that meaningfully cites a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed journal articles found in Milner Library's "Communication Source" database. Citations and references must follow APA style, 7th edition. Project materials and copies of your articles must be submitted on ISU Canvas in the Assignments function.

Active Learning Site:

Our publishing company, Cognella, has an Active Learning website—which is a *separate* Canvas site from ISU Canvas. *You are required to complete quizzes, case studies, interactive videos, written assignments, and skill builders for each chapter.* The flashcards are optional but reviewing them is the best way to prepare for the quizzes and exams.

Required Textbook and Active Learning Account:

The textbook and Active Learning account are required and necessary to successfully complete the course. We start using both in week 3, so don't delay ordering. You can purchase the textbook, in either print or ebook form, and Active Learning account access at <https://store.cognella.com/91622>. The campus bookstore is another option.

Hunt, S. K., & Meyer, K. R. (2026). *Theories for human communication: Advocating for social change* (1st ed.). Cognella. [<https://store.cognella.com/91622>]

Required PDF readings can be found on ISU Canvas. Secure access to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition); help sheets are available on Canvas.

Required PDF Articles (citations listed in the order we read them):

- Miller, K. (2005). *Communication theories: Perspectives, processes, and contexts* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 119-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x>
- Acheson, K. (2008). Silence as gesture: Rethinking the nature of communicative silences. *Communication Theory*, 18(4), 535-555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00333.x>

Tentative Schedule

Week 1	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 17	*Philosophy of the course, assignments, and syllabus policies *How to acquire textbook and access to Active Learning	*Read Syllabus *Explore ISU Canvas
W, Aug. 19	*Overview of theory and metatheory * https://store.cognella.com/91622	*Buy Textbook & Active Learning
F, Aug. 21	*Defining Communication (and drawing activity)	*Read Miller excerpt
Week 2	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 24	*Seven Traditions of Communication Theory	*Read Craig (1999)
W, Aug. 26	*Theory Project guidelines and topic brainstorming *Seven Traditions of Communication Theory	*Read Craig (1999)
F, Aug. 28	*Theorizing Silence as Communication	*Read Acheson (2008)
Week 3	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 31	**“The Scope of Communication.”	*Read Chapter 1
W, Sep. 2	**“The Scope of Communication.”	*Read Chapter 1
F, Sep. 4	**“Foundations of Theory.”	*Read Chapter 2
Week 4	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 7	*No Class (Labor Day)	
W, Sep. 9	**“Foundations of Theory.”	*Read Chapter 2
F, Sep. 11	**“Metatheory.”	*Read Chapter 3
Week 5	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 14	**“Metatheory.”	*Read Chapter 3
W, Sep. 16	**“Advocating Social Change.”	*Read Chapter 4
F, Sep. 18	**“Advocating Social Change.”	*Read Chapter 4
Week 6	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 21	**“Contemporary Communication Challenges.”	*Read Chapter 5
W, Sep. 23	**“Contemporary Communication Challenges.”	*Read Chapter 5
F, Sep. 25	**“Meeting Contemporary Challenges.”	*Read Chapter 6
Week 7	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 28	**“Meeting Contemporary Challenges.”	*Read Chapter 6
W, Sep. 30	**“Addressing Divisions and Differences.”	*Read Chapter 7
F, Oct. 2	**“Addressing Divisions and Differences.”	*Read Chapter 7
Week 8	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 5	*Review for first exam	**Active Learning chapters 1-7 graded
W, Oct. 7	***FIRST EXAMINATION	
F, Oct. 9	*Debrief exam *Sharing of Theory Project topic updates and research	

Week 9	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 12	*“Understanding Identity and Marginalized Voices.”	*Read Chapter 8
W, Oct. 14	*“Understanding Identity and Marginalized Voices.”	*Read Chapter 8
F, Oct. 16	*“Advocating and Processing.”	*Read Chapter 9
Week 10	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 19	*“Advocating and Processing.”	*Read Chapter 9
W, Oct. 21	*“Communicating with Others.”	*Read Chapter 10
F, Oct. 23	*“Communicating with Others.”	*Read Chapter 10
Week 11	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 26	*“Navigating Structures, Institutions, and Crises.”	*Read Chapter 11
W, Oct. 28	*“Navigating Structures, Institutions, and Crises.”	*Read Chapter 11
F, Oct. 30	*“Understanding Language and Symbols.”	*Read Chapter 12
Week 12	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 2	*“Understanding Language and Symbols.”	*Read Chapter 12
W, Nov. 4	*“Reaching Mass Audiences.”	*Read Chapter 13
F, Nov. 6	*“Reaching Mass Audiences.”	*Read Chapter 13
Week 13	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 9	*“Learning.”	*Read Chapter 14
W, Nov. 11	*“Learning.”	*Read Chapter 14
F, Nov. 13	*Review for second exam	**Active Learning chapters 8-14 graded
Week 14	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 16	***SECOND EXAMINATION	
W, Nov. 18	*Debrief exam	
F, Nov. 20	*Finalizing Theory Projects & References Check *Sharing of Theory Projects	<i>*Research Board final deadline</i>
Week 15	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 23	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
W, Nov. 25	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
F, Nov. 27	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
Week 16	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 30	*Sharing of Theory Projects	**Theory Project due
W, Dec. 2	*Review for Final Exam (chapters 1-7)	
F, Dec 4	*Review for Final Exam (chapters 8-14)	*Course Evaluations
Finals Week	Topic	Assignments Due
?, Dec. ?	***FINAL EXAMINATION (date and time TBA by Registrar)	