

COM 409 Seminar in Health Communication Spring Fall 2025

“Only through communication can human life hold meaning.” (Paulo Freire)
“We all require and want respect: man or woman, black or white, [poor or rich]. It’s our basic human right.” (Aretha Franklin)

Class: Wednesday 6:30-9:15 Fell 152

Instructors: Lance R. Lippert

Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00; T & TR 11:00-noon; and by appointment

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Please contact me through Canvas mail unless it is an unrelated course question or an emergency. I will try to respond ASAP, but it may take me up to 24 hours to respond.

Required texts and readings:

Thompson, T. L., & Harrington, N. G. (Eds.). (2022). *The Routledge handbook of health communication* (Third edition.). Routledge. The textbook is reserved on-line at Milner Library by using the link below.

https://i-share-isu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CARLI_ISU/kt5co6/alma9921806569505845

Harrington, N. G., Record, R. A., & EBSCOhost. (2024). *Health communication: research and practice for a diverse and changing world* (Second edition.). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003214458>

*The text will be supplemented by additional readings and case studies.

Course Description: Health communication is an area of study that encompasses theories, research, and application of symbolic processes by which individuals and communities deal with issues related to wellness and illness through beliefs, practices, and policies. This class is designed to be an overview of significant concepts and issues that have emerged in health communication scholarship and practice. This course explores health communication research and practice including the examination of the role of communication in health care delivery, health promotion and disease prevention, risk communication, as well as in promoting personal and psychosocial wellbeing. Although grounded in relevant communication and interdisciplinary theory, the goal of this course is to blend theory with practical application in various contexts and processes. The course cuts across multiple levels of communication, different communication channels, various contexts, and the use of diverse communication media and technologies.

Instructional Strategies: Course concepts and content will be explored through various instructional strategies including: (1) textbook and professional journal readings (reading list), (2) Discussions, class activities, case studies, and speakers/interviews with relevant health communication professionals and consumers, (3) semester project which will apply relevant literature and theory to practical health communication contexts, and (4) assessment in the form of several short position papers.

Why This Course Is Important (to you and to your community): There is a growing awareness that communication not only affects but is inextricably intertwined with issues of health and medicine. This is true on a personal, intimate level in the way patients and caregivers interact in the examination and hospital room. It is also true on an organizational level in that policies and community relations affect the way that health care is provided and the way that people feel about the providers. It is also evident in media campaigns that seek to educate people about health. At every level, the importance of health communication is extraordinary, but so are the challenges. Just look over your shoulder at the recent COVID pandemic.

People who understand communication are in an important place to help, and their services are increasingly in demand. Communication skills are important for professional caregivers, but that is not all. Health communication specialists work (a) in hospital education departments, teaching medical professionals to communicate more effectively; (b) in public relations, marketing, and human resource departments; (c) in patient satisfaction and patient advocacy programs; (d) in health care administration; (e) in media organizations covering health issues; (f) in nonprofit organizations; and (g) in organizations that educate the public and support public policy and research.

Course Objectives: This seminar will prepare students to:

- Describe the role of communication in personal, cultural, institutional, and public health care situations.
- Identify, describe, and apply communication theories (interpersonal, organizational, group, mass media, CMC) and health communication theories to help explain the delivery of health care and health care messages.
- Identify relevant elements of health literacy and advocacy issues.
- Analyze, describe, and critically evaluate positive and negative effects/consequences of messages in health communication campaigns, promotions, and social media.
- Research, analyze, and write about health communication issues.
- Identify and analyze issues (i.e., culture, technology, social norms, ethics) that influence care-giving interactions.
- Critically evaluate communication behaviors in health care relationships, public health, and health care organizations.
- Articulate how public health issues and health communication affect various populations in our local and global communities.

In other words, after taking this course, we will better understand how the health industry operates and what role we might play in it. To accomplish this we will develop the ability to:

- Describe the current landscape of health care.
- Describe societal and cultural viewpoints about health care and determine how this affects access (social justice).
- Research about issues in personal and public health care communication contexts.
- Knowledgeably discuss current issues in health care.
- Differentiate among health, wellness, and illness.
- Comprehend the dynamic between mental and physical health.
- Analyze patient–caregiver communication.
- Engage in informed dialogue about ethical issues in health communication.
- Describe patients’ and caregivers’ perspectives.
- Identify and discuss the types of diversity among patients and caregivers.
- Define the role of social support in maintaining health, wellness, and coping with illness.
- Analyze the advantages and challenges of communicating about health via social media, mobile devices, computers, and other technology.
- Analyze and describe organizational issues in health communication (leadership, public relations, marketing, human resources, crisis management, and so on).
- Identify media images about health and their influence on communication.
- Comment knowledgeably on health crisis communication and health care reform options.
- Identify the key steps in planning, implementing, and assessing health promotion campaigns.

Course Requirements: Your grade for this course will depend on how many points you earn from each of the following:

Short Papers (100 points):

- **Story Telling/Reflection Paper (50 pts.)**. The paper is meant to be reflective of personal interest, knowledge, beliefs, relationships, and personal experiences. I am looking for clear and concise writing, sound analysis, and effective integration of course material and theory into the writings, and reasoned conclusions. The paper (3-5 pages) will be a personal health **narrative** describing an experience, observation, or health care situation. Reflect on and write about a recent experience with health as a patient, customer, caregiver, friend, family member, loved-one, provider, or consumer. Tell a story that includes the situation, the participants, and outcomes. You will need to provide an introduction that includes an overview and context for the story. Only share what you feel comfortable sharing. [refer to chapter 4]
- **Interview Paper (50 pts.)**. The interview paper is just that: A paper summarizing and analyzing an interview (conversation) with a health professional. What role does communication play in the health situation? You will be given more specific instructions later in the semester, but in the meantime, be thinking about this project while doing the readings and during our class discussion. The questions you will ask this person will be derived from the readings and class discussions. You may interview someone in your social network or may contact someone else. You'll turn in a 3–5 page synopsis and partial transcript of the interview. Interview papers will be discussed in class the day they are due.

Semester Project-Research Paper & IRB (200 points): You will need to propose a project topic and do research. You can work with another classmate or by yourself. The goal is to produce a product acceptable for convention presentation. Most journal and convention guidelines specify that papers should be no longer than 25 pages (excluding references, tables, etc.). On average, a 15 to 20-page paper is a reasonable length. Writing in a clear and concise manner is an ongoing, learning process that all of us constantly work to perfect. Hopeful this course will challenge us to become better research and writers as well as provide an opportunity to improve our knowledge about health communication in this growing and dynamic area. Feel free to consult with me on your papers prior to grading. Papers should be written using APA (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th Ed.; <http://www.stylewizard.com/>) guidelines as this is the style accepted by our discipline. This semester project will be done in the following stages:

- **Choose your research topic (1-2 pages) (10 pts.)**. Pick an interest topic/area, provide a rationale, and write a short description (week 4).
- **A research proposal (10 pages) (70 pts.)**. As you know, this is the first step in the research process in which you (a) identify an idea, problem, question, or hypothesis, (b) describe the purpose of the study, (c) provide a rationale for the study question(s), (d) define all key concepts/terms in the research question(s), (e) review previous research directly relevant to your study question, (f) provide theoretical framework and potential practical implications, and (g) describe a proposed method, including participants, measurement instruments or procedures, location(s), time frame, and a rationale for your choices (week 10).
- **IRB application for research approval (on-line) (20 pts.)**. Make sure that you are CITI trained and certified. I will serve as co-PI (week 10).
- **Final paper (15-20 pages) (100 pts.)**. For this stage, you can make any edits or adjustments from your research proposal. The final paper needs to include the following sections: (1) an introduction, (2) review of literature with RQs, (3) methods, (4) results/findings, (5) conclusion, and (6) references.

Professional Points (100 points): Class sessions will incorporate discussions and some structured activities. Class sessions will often move beyond the assigned readings to issue analysis, theory application, and communication skill development (including guest presenters, activities, case studies, discussion questions, and “learning conversations”). You are responsible for reading the assigned material prior to class. You are expected to discuss the readings and your ideas informally each session. **I will expect**

you to submit weekly discussion questions with talking prompts prior to class. Because this course is a seminar, not a lecture class, your own involvement and active engagement are imperative. In order for our discussions to be productive you will need to: (1) show knowledge of readings and have given thought to what you have read, (2) provide discussion questions or points for discussion from each of the readings, (3) articulate your ideas clearly and argue effectively for your position, (4) contribute to a lively interchange of ideas, (5) synthesize ideas across various readings, (6) respond thoughtfully to the comments of others. Failure to contribute to class discussion, in a meaningful way, will negatively affect your participation grade. Physical presence is necessary, but not enough for participation. I will evaluate student participation at the end of each class. Failure to contribute to class discussion, in a meaningful way, will negatively affect your participation grade. Physical presence is necessary, but not sufficient for participation. **I will make participation notes after every class.**

Summary of Grading:

Short Papers	100 points
Semester Paper & presentation	200 points
Professional Points	100 points
Total	400 points

The final letter grade for the course (and grades for the other assignments) will be based on a standard scale (90-100%=A; 80-89%=B; 70-79%=C; 60-69%=D; 0-59%=F)

NOTE: Failure to turn in any of the course requirements may result in failure of the course.

Course Policies and Requirements:

Preparation & Participation. By definition, a graduate seminar requires extensive preparation and participation from all participants. You are obligated to be prepared for intelligent class discussion. The quality of this seminar depends ultimately upon the willingness of each participant to constructively and creatively engage the materials, issues, and discussions. Do the assigned readings. Take time prior to class to reflect upon your assignments and your participation. If something is unclear, particularly interesting, or you have some insight, contact me or make a note of it and you're your question during class.

Professional Courtesy. As this is a graduate seminar and during a unique time of remote learning, I feel it is unnecessary to emphasize issues such as respect for the class (attendance, turning assignments in on time, etc.) and the members of the seminar (respecting others' opinions, being respectful to those who are speaking, and working together in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition). I do, however, want to be clear about my expectations. I believe graduate school is an experience designed to bring professional individuals together to increase and expand knowledge. Thus, I will expect your behaviors and attitudes towards this course to reflect professional courtesy. If I believe a student is not meeting my expectations (e.g., excessive absences, inadequate work, disrespect for others, etc.), I will notify you immediately and a decision will be made concerning your need to drop the course.

Deadlines. All assignments must be completed on schedule and must be handed in when due. No make-ups or extensions will be permitted unless the student contacts the instructor **prior** to the due date and has a verifiable excuse. One letter grade will be deducted for each day that any assignment is late.

Attendance Policy: Please be prepared to discuss the daily readings. Be engaged. Perfect attendance is expected, because by enrolling in this course you have made a commitment to being present during all class meetings. Being absent deprives you of valuable discussions and information. Historically, there has been a strong correlation between absences and grades; the more class time that students miss, the lower the grades they tend to earn. Missing more than 2 class periods will result in a 5% deduction from your overall course grade for each additional unexcused absence.

Late Work and Incomplete Grade Policy:

All assignments are expected at the beginning of class on the due date. An automatic 10% of the points possible will be deducted from late assignments, with an additional 10% deducted for each 24 hours the assignment is late. If these penalties seem steep, please consider that in eight more weeks you will likely be in a position where late work is not accepted at all. In the case of documented university excused absences, assignments should be completed *prior* to the absence. As a rule, incomplete grades will not be given.

Academic Development: There is a great place on campus if you need some assistance with study skills and writing. For workshops, tutoring, or coaching, check out <http://ucollege.illinoisstate.edu>.

Academic Misconduct: Academic dishonesty involves cheating or plagiarizing. All University Policies concerning academic misconduct will be upheld in this course. Refer to the I.S.U. Code of Conduct at Community Rights and Responsibilities (<http://www.deanofstudents.ilstu.edu/downloads/crr/code-of-student-conduct.pdf>). Of particular concern in a course with written assignments is the issue of plagiarism.

Webster (1989) defines plagiarism as "the appropriations or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (p. 1100). In other words, plagiarism is stealing. You must cite your sources accurately and consistently in both your oral and written assignments. I will not tolerate such misconduct, and it may result in a failing grade. Please remember 1) You cannot simply copy material from a source (including classmates) and present it as your own original material, 2) You cannot download a paper from any sort of online outlet and present it as original work, and 3) You cannot hand in a paper for my class that you wrote for another class.

Mental Health Resources: Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. [Student Counseling Services \(SCS\)](#) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at counseling.illinoisstate.edu or by calling (309) 438-3655.

Student Access and Accommodation Services: Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Tentative Class Schedule Fall 2025

Week	Section	Readings (additional readings case studies, & assignments will be added).
Week #1	Syllabus & self-care activity	
Week #2	Grounding Healthy People 2030 assignment	1. Chapter 1. Harrington & Record, Understanding Health Communication-Foundation (pp. 6-22) 2. Chapter 2. Harrington & Record, Discrimination and Health Communication (pp. 30-45) 3. Social Justice in Health. On-line link.
Week #3	Section 1	1 The Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary, and Transdisciplinary Nature of Health Communication Scholarship. Elisia L. Cohen 2 Theoretical and Methodological Matters in Health Communication: Navigating Current and Future Directions. Nancy Grant Harrington, Diane B. Francis, and Aurora Occa
Week #4	Narratives Story Telling assignment	4 Narrative Features, Forms, and Functions: Telling Stories to Foster Well-Being, Humanize Healthcare, and Catalyze Change. Lynn M. Harter, Jill Yamasaki, and Anna M. Kerr DUE: Topic paper.
Week #5	Section II	Chapters 5 to 11. I will assign the chapters.
Week #6	Section II	Chapters 5 to 11. I will assign the chapters. DUE: Storytelling paper.
Week #7	Section III	Chapters 12 to 15. I will assign the chapters.
Week #8	Section III	Chapters 12 to 15. I will assign the chapters.
Week #9	Section IV	Chapters 16 to 18. I will assign the chapters.
Week #10	Section V	Chapters 19 to 22. I will assign the chapters. DUE: Research Proposal. DUE: IRB application.
Week #11	Section VI	Chapters 23 to 26. I will assign the chapters.
Week #12	Section VII	Chapters 27 to 33. I will assign the chapters.
Week #13	Section VIII	Chapters 34 to 39. I will assign the chapters.
Week #14	NCA TH, NOV. 20 TO SUNDAY, NOV. 23	We are planning on having class which depends on NCA participants.
Week #15	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Week #16	WRAP UP & WORK TIME	
Finals Week	WED, DEC. 10 at 5:00??????	DUE: Final Paper & informal paper presentations.