

Syllabus for SPCHASL 120/Human Communication

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Course objectives

Human Communication is an introduction to Communication Theory, the scientific analysis of communicative behavior in both linguistic and nonverbal modalities. The course is broad in scope and inter-disciplinary in its language and methods. The course provides an introductory level of information in the history of Western thinking about communication, as well as a foundation for the understanding of how speech and nonverbal behaviors function in a complementary fashion. The course is intended as a basis for further work by Communication majors and by students in related social-science curricula.

Topics

A number of topics in communication theory are addressed in the course. During the first phase of the course, we will review foundational principles, the concepts and working vocabulary of the field.

During the second phase, the history of thinking in the field will be reconstructed. Students will review ideas about communication from classical antiquity, particularly the Platonic/Aristotelian controversy regarding the intellectual and moral status of rhetoric. Students will be introduced to modern theories of communication that borrow from advances in Information theory and General Systems theory. Students will learn about theories of communicative interaction, such as Rules Theory and the Politeness Imperative, that borrow from Ordinary Language philosophy. Finally, students will be introduced to post-modern, critical theories in communication, particularly the ideas of Frankfurt School scholars, such as J. Habermas.

During the third phase, students will be introduced to scientific theory about the speech modality. Design features of speech will be discussed and implications for our understanding of where speech fits in the zoo-semiotic spectrum of communication will be addressed. The origins and evolution of human communication will be explored from several competing perspectives. Students will also be introduced to cultural beliefs and attitudes regarding the language and the speech of others. Social and political implications of these beliefs and attitudes will be considered.

During the fourth phase, an introductory level of information regarding various nonverbal modalities of human communication, including Chronemics and the cultural significance of silence, will be provided. Various approaches to analyzing nonverbal behavior will be reviewed.

Evaluation

The semester grade for the course will be based on four written examinations. Each examination will be worth 100 points. Cumulative point totals for all students will be curved at the end of the term. Extra-credit opportunities will be available. Materials required for extra-credit work will be maintained in the Instructors Reserve section of the Library, or on easily accessible internet sites.

Text

Human Communication. Patrick Mills (ed.) Cengage Custom Publishing, 2008.

Student Learning Outcomes for Speech Communication 120/Human Communication

1. Analyze human communication processes from a number of scientific perspectives.
2. Develop enhanced sensitivity to and appreciation for individual and cultural variation in human communication.
3. Demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge of human communication to practical and research problems through essay writing and discussion.

Methods of Assessment

Students will write essays for several exams scheduled during the semester; additionally, a 2,500 hundred word research paper will be assigned.

The essay exams will be written to assess the depth of student knowledge regarding various approaches to the communication process, and student awareness and appreciation of diversity in the phenomenon. The research paper will require substantial ability to demonstrate theoretical currency to practical problems.

Faculty Analysis of Assessment Results

A student learning outcomes assessment survey will be administered to all enrolled students at the beginning of the semester. The survey will consist of several continuous, Likert-type scales designed to determine student self-expressed skills in the course learning outcomes. The survey will be conducted, again, at the end of the semester. Instructors who teach Speech 120 will meet at the end of the term to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the course.