TEACHING INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION ONLINE

Caroline S. Parsons, University of Alabama

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

The introductory course in communication is typically a required general education course at colleges and universities. Seiler and McGukin (1989) described the introductory course as a critical part in the curriculum in communication studies. Emphasizing such skills as verbal, nonverbal, relational, small group, intercultural, and organizational communication, the introductory course in communication is often the only communication course that majors from across campus will take as part of a general education requirement. The knowledge and skills taught in communication courses are essential to being hired (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017), and the demand for communication courses continues to grow each year (National Communication Association, 2019).

While instructors may adopt a variety of approaches in teaching the introductory course, the COM 101 *Introduction to Human Communication* course syllabus shared in this article is offered in an online format. As such, quizzes and exams comprise a large percentage of the course. Student engagement and discussion is also an important part of the course. Several instructions about engaging in online discussion are included in the syllabus. This syllabus includes a course description, course objectives, course assignments, weekly schedule, course assessments, and course policies for the introductory-level orientation to the field of communication studies.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This introductory course is designed to teach the foundations of human communication and the functions of communication in everyday situations. After completing this course, students should: 1) know the history, structure and questions that define the field of communication; 2) understand the nature and importance of theory in the study of communication; 3) be able to identify key issues in perception, verbal, nonverbal, relational, small group, intercultural, and organizational communication; 4) be able to apply communication concepts and theories to everyday life; and 5) understand how communication studies fits within the social and behavioral sciences.

I organized this online course with several discussions integrated into the modules in order to promote student engagement with course readings and course materials. The goal of an online course, in my opinion, should be to help the students feel a sense of community and interdependence similar to what they experience in a face-to-face class. Wesp, Kash, Sandry, and Patton (2013) recommend that instructors provide clear information about classroom behavior in their syllabi. As such, this course syllabus includes several rules for discussion (e.g., netiquette, respect for divergent opinions) that promote supportive classroom discourse where students can express their ideas and opinions.

DISCUSSION BOARD PARTICIPATION

Docan-Morgan (2014, 2016) describes several ways to promote active engagement in the online course in communication. For example, a comment posted by a student in the discussion board should demonstrate that he or she is "listening" to classmates and synthesizing their comments. A quality post should draw readers in and make them want to participate in discussion. All posts should be based on the textbook and course concepts and should be free from grammar and spelling errors. Finally, all discussion posts should practice netiquette and be respectful of other students' divergent opinions. This syllabus integrates these guidelines into the description of course assignments and assessments of the discussion board messages.

On the day that the discussion board for a module opens, students should post an original comment that shares new information about the concepts described in the textbook. At least one original comment is required by the first day that the module is scheduled to begin. During the dates that the discussion board is open, students are expected to respond to at least three of their classmates' original comments. Students are advised to spread out their postings on multiple days so that a substantial discussion evolves. Finally, students are asked to respond to the responses to their original comments during the dates that the board is open.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

For an asynchronous online course, such as COM 101 online, attendance is measured by logging into the course management systems (e.g., blackboard) each day. Because an asynchronous online course does not require students to be online at any particular time, students can go at their own pace. The syllabus clearly explains in the course policies that, "daily attendance by logging onto blackboard to view lectures, participate in discussions, and homework and quizzes is required." In general, I have had positive experiences with self-paced students who enroll in the course knowing that they must be disciplined and organized in order to succeed.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

In any online course, it is important to include a policy in the syllabus pertaining to the technical requirements necessary to be successful in the course. The COM 101 syllabus contains a policy that states, "this course requires a high-speed internet connection and a compatible browser. You will need access to Microsoft Word, Blackboard, and your student email account in order to complete assignments." It is crucial that students monitor their emails and respond to messages pertaining to the course. Students who require technical assistance should contact the technical support team at their college or university.

CONCLUSION

After more than 20 years, I can say that Introduction to Human Communication is one of the most exciting courses to teach. With this course, some students experience communication studies for the first time

and may be influenced to switch to a Communication Studies major. The skills learned in COM 101 are very useful to students' future personal and professional success.

REFERENCES

Docan-Morgan, T. (2016). Teaching interpersonal communication online: Experiential opportunities and student engagement. *Syllabus, 5*(2), 1-15.

Docan-Morgan, T. (2014). The nonverbal communication course: Active engagement in class and online. *Syllabus, 3*(1), 1-17.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017). Survey of employers. Retrieved on July 1, 2019 from: https://www.naceweb.org/store/2017/job-outlook-2017/

National Communication Association (2019). Data reports on programs and enrollment. Retrieved on July 1, 2019 from: https://www.natcom.org/publication-type/reports-discipline.

Seiler, W. J. & McGukin, D. (1989). What we know about the basic course: What has the research told us? In L. Hugenberg (Ed.), *Basic Communication Course Annual*, *1*, 27-41. Boston: American Press.

Wesp, R., Kash, M., Sandry, J., & Patton, L. (2013). Should syllabi communicate expectations regarding appropriate classroom behaviors? *Syllabus*, *2*(2), 1-10.

SYLLABUS: COM 101 INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

General introduction to communication studies as a way of understanding how humans coordinate social meaning and achieve communicative goals. The focus is on identifying the foundation of human communication and the function of communication in everyday situations. *Social Behavioral Science* designation for university core curriculum.

REQUIRED READING:

Alberts, J.K., Nakayama, T.K, & Martin, J.N. (2016). *Human Communication in Society.* 4th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Publishing.

OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:

Readings and video links will be posted in Blackboard.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course students should:

- Know the history, structure and questions that define the field of communication.

- Understand the nature and importance of theory in the study of communication.

- Be able to identify key issues in perception, verbal, nonverbal, relational, small group, intercultural, and organizational communication.

- Be able to apply communication concepts and theories to everyday life.

- Understand how communication studies fits within the social and behavioral sciences.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

DISCUSSIONS

(7 @ 10 points each): For each module, you will post *and* respond to others' posts each day. An effective post provokes thought and reflects diligent reading of the course material; an effective response to a post demonstrates substance, critical thinking, and higher order thinking. You are responsible for responding to your classmates' responses to your posts. Discussions consist of a variety of comments and questions about the readings, videos, and your own personal experiences. Some discussions have corresponding activities.

QUIZZES

(6 @ 20 points each): At the end of each module, there is a timed quiz. Quizzes are designed to test your understanding of the concepts from the readings and lectures.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

(2 @ 25 points each): Carefully follow the instructions for completing the writing assignment after Module 4 (Breeching Social Norms) and Module 5 (Career Interview and Application).

EXAMS

(2 @ 200 points each): Midterm exam and final exam. The final is not cumulative.

The following point breakdown below represents the maximum credit allowed for each assignment.

Discussion Boards	7 @ 10 pts each	70 pts
Written Assignments	2 @ 25 points each	50 pts
Quizzes	6 @ 20 points each	120 pts
Exams	2 @ 200 points each	400 pts
TOTAL		640 pts

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

All work is due on the specific dates listed below by 11:59 p.m.

- **Discussion dates – students are required to participate daily** (see dates below).
- **Quiz dates – note the open-and-close dates and times below.**

You have a 2-day span to take quizzes and exams beginning at 12:01 a.m. on the first date indicated and ending at 11:59 p.m. on the second date indicated.

Date	Module and Assignment Description
Week 1	**Getting Started** Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the course Blackboard site. Participate in the Introduction Module.
Discussion:	• Introduce yourself in the *Introductions* Discussion
Week 2	**Module 1: Perspectives of Human Communication** Read the material assigned in the module: Chapters 1-2. Watch the video lectures in the module.
Discussion:	• Participate in Module 1 Discussion on *Monday and Tuesday* and post and respond to classmates • Both discussions: *Defining Comm* and *Research in Comm*
Quiz:	• Complete Module 1 Quiz
	Module 2: Perceiving Communication and Identity Read the material assigned in the module: Chapters 3-4. Watch the video lectures in the module.
	• Participate in Module 2 Discussion on *Wednesday and Thursday* and post and respond to classmates • Discussion: *Self-Presentation*
	• Complete Module 2 Quiz

Week 3	**Module 3: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication** Read the material assigned in the module: Chapters 5-6. Watch the video lectures in the module.
Discussion:	• Participate in Module 3 Discussion on each day *Monday and Tuesday* and post and respond to classmates • Discussion: *Minding Our Words*
Quiz:	• Complete Module 3 Quiz
Midterm:	• Midterm Exam due
	Module 4: Listening, Responding, and Intercultural Comm. Read the material assigned in the module: Chapters 7-8. Watch the video lectures in the module.
	• Participation in Module 4 Discussion on *Thursday and Friday* and post and respond to classmates • Discussion: *Intercultural Communication*
Week 4	**Module 4: Listening, Responding, Intercultural (continued)**
Quiz:	• Complete Module 4 Quiz
Paper:	• Complete Module 4 Written Assignment (*Breeching Social Norms*)
	Module 5: Close Relationships Read the material assigned in the module: Chapter 9. Watch the video lectures in the module.
Discussion:	• Participate in Module 5 Discussion on *Wednesday and Thursday* and post and respond to classmates • Discussion*: Sing It, Rather Than Say It*
Quiz:	• Complete Module 5 Quiz
Paper:	• Complete Module 5 Written Assignment (*Career Interview*)
Week 5	**Module 6: Small Group Communication & Communication in Organizations** Read the material assigned in the module: Chapters 10-11. Watch the video lectures in the module.
Discussion:	• Participate in Module 6 Discussion on Monday only • Discussion*: Small Group Communication*
Quiz:	• Complete Module 6 Quiz
Final Exam:	Final Exam due

COURSE POLICIES:

ATTENDANCE

Daily attendance by logging onto Blackboard to view lectures, participate in discussions, and homework and quizzes is required. This class is asynchronous and self-paced.

MAKE-UP WORK

No make-up work (e.g., homework, paper, quiz) is accepted without appropriate documentation. All make-up work must be resolved within a week of its original due date.

MAKE-UP WORK

No make-up work (e.g., speech, outline, quiz, exam) is accepted without appropriate documentation. All make-up work must be resolved within a week of the original due date.

TURNING IN ASSIGNMENTS

Make special note of how each assignment is due on Blackboard (e.g., course home page, discussion board). Assignments submitted through email will not receive a grade.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT COMPLETITION

Failure to complete *any one* of the major required elements (e.g., homework, paper, quiz) of the course will result in an "F" for the final course grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any behavior which violates UA's policies on academic integrity will result in a failing course grade, along with possible indefinite suspension from the university.

GRADES

The 24/7 rule is in effect. The instructor will discuss grades 24 hours after and *within one week* of handing back the assignment. Appeals will be considered in writing only.

GRADING SCALE

90-92.9 (A-); 93-98.9 (A); 99-100 (A+); 80-82.9 (B-); 83-88.9 (B); 89-89.9 (B+); 70-72.9 (C-); 73-78.9 (C); 79-79.9 (C+); 60-62.9 (D-); 63-68.9 (D); 69-69.9 (D+); and 0-59.4 (F).

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

This course requires a high-speed internet connection and a compatible browser. You will need access to Microsoft Word to complete assignments.

MINIMUM STUDENT TECHNICAL SKILLS

Participation in an online course requires knowledge of computer technology. You should already be able to access and use Blackboard, Microsoft Word, and your Crimson email account. Contact *College of Continuing Studies* technical support online if you need assistance.

EMAIL

Use email to contact your instructor. It is crucial that you monitor your Crimson Mail regularly as you will be responsible for notices sent to that address.

APPENDIX 1: DISCUSSION BOARD PARTICIPATION

Assignment Description[1]

For each discussion, you should first share an original comment by the first day that the module is scheduled to begin. Then, begin commenting on your classmate's posts and responding to comments about your own original posts. Check the board often and make comments each day, as listed in the schedule.

QUANTITY OF POSTS

- *At least one* original comment by the first day that the module is scheduled to begin.

- Responses to *at least three* of your classmates' original comments during the dates that the board is open, as listed in the schedule. Spread out your postings on multiple days so that you are able to synthesize other perspectives, demonstrate listening, and contribute to an evolving discussion. Posting three times in one day and zero times on the other dates of discussion is not acceptable. When possible, respond to posts with zero or only one response before responding to posts that have more than two responses.

- Respond to *all* or *almost all* of your classmates' responses to your original comments during the dates that the board is open. Do your best to respond to everyone who commented on your original post.

QUALITY OF POSTS

All posts should:

- Be factually accurate, based on course concepts and textbook terms.

- Introduce new and relevant information.

- Be relevant to the issue being discussed.

- Engage others to want to participate in additional discussion.

- Be original (if you copy or paraphrase another source, you must cite it).

- Use appropriate grammar, spelling, punctuation, and citations.

- Contain a subject title that draws readers in (instead of writing "Module 1").

---

[1] *Special thanks to*: Tony Docan-Morgan of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for publishing these discussion board participation guidelines in an article entitled "The nonverbal communication course" in a 2014 edition of *Syllabus*.

- Demonstrate that you are listening to classmates and synthesizing their comments.

- Practice netiquette; be respectful of other students' divergent opinions.

Example of a good discussion post:
In his book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman held that people tend to manage others' impressions of them through self-presentation and face. Through facework, Goffman wrote, "the expressiveness capacity to give impressions appears to involve two radically different kinds of facework: the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off" (p. 2). To underscore what my classmate wrote about managing impressions on social media, we may post one thing, but the public takes it differently. For example, recently [Roseanne Barr posted] what she thought was a harmless joke on twitter. Barr commented later that she was only kidding when she compared Valerie Jarrett to an ape, and according to the New York Times, Barr claimed she thought Jarrett was Jewish and Persian, not African American. Nonetheless, the expression she thought she was giving (a joke) was not how the public perceived the comment (as a racist comment). In the end, Barr lost her job over this poor communication.

THINGS TO AVOID

- Excessive "I agree" responses without context or explanation.

- Excessive postings in one forum (e.g., "hogging" the discussion). Everyone reads through the postings, so try to stay on topic and let others share their knowledge.

- Lack of respect for divergent opinions. Please show the respect you want bestowed on you. Your comments should be respectful of all individuals, including the general public, non-students, and public figures. I read all the posted comments. If I think your comments are inappropriate, I will delete them from the discussion board. I will also let you know in a private email why I found them inappropriate.

- Off-topic comments. Driving off the path is healthy occasionally but try to be mindful of the discussion at hand.

- Overly long threads. Remember there are several people in this class; try not to make your responses too long.

GRADING INFORMATION

Contributions to the discussions are assessed based on the below criteria:

COMPLETELY MEETS EXPECTATIONS (10/10 POINTS)

Student successfully fulfills all expectations for quantity of posts

Student successfully fulfills all expectations for quality of posts

Student does not commit any of the things to avoid

MEETS MOST EXPECTATIONS (8 TO 9 OUT OF 10 POINTS)

Student fulfills most expectations for quantity of posts

Student fulfills most expectations for quality of posts

Student does not commit any of the things to avoid

MEETS SOME EXPECTATIONS (5 TO 7 OUT OF 10 POINTS)

Student fulfills some expectations for quantity of posts

Student fulfills some expectations for quality of posts OR

Student commits one of the things to avoid

DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS (0 TO 4 OUT OF 10 POINTS

Student fulfills only one expectation for quantity of posts OR

Student fulfills 0-4 of the expectations for quality of posts OR

Student commits two of the things to avoid

APPENDIX 2: BREECHING SOCIAL NORMS

Assignment Description

OVERVIEW

In this assignment, you will become better acquainted with the rules of nonverbal communication and analyze some of the effects of breaking those rules. Oftentimes we are unaware that we are following rules about nonverbal expectations until we, or someone else, breaks them.

For example, in North America, typically we do not stare at others we do not know, sit next to others on a bus when plenty of other empty seats are available, or join in a conversation that nearby strangers are having. Neither do we invade others' personal space or wear a business suit to class for "no reason." In this assignment, you will violate a social norm or expectation about nonverbal communication and write about the experience.

DIRECTIONS

1. Choose a social expectation (an expectation that you will violate).

2. Make a concerted effort to break the rule without looking like you are doing so for amusement or a study. In other words, try to break the rule while acting naturally. **Note:** No rule should be broken if it means infringing on the rights of others or committing morally, ethically, or legally inappropriate behaviors. Make sure you are not jeopardizing important relationships that cannot be repaired through explanation.

3. Reflect on the experience:

    a. Which rule of nonverbal expectations did you violate?

    b. What did your observer notice about your nonverbal violation and how do you think he or she evaluated you? How did this make you feel and why?

4. Use information from two chapters and answer:

    a. Consider *key* ideas, theories, and terms and *explain* how your reflections about this experience relate to the violation of nonverbal rules and expectations.

5. Write 1-2 double-spaced pages using the information you gathered from above.

6. Save your paper as yourname_breeching_social.

APPENDIX 3: CAREER INTERVIEW AND APPLICATION

Assignment Description

OVERVIEW

This course has given you a bird's eye view of human communication, from perception and nonverbal to small group and organizational. You have looked at micro-level issues and macro-level topics. For any chapter covered in this course, our department offers at least two (if not three) classes or specialty classes that address the chapter information in significant depth, theoretically, and practically. Use the information you have learned to help choose the path you wish to take to further your career interest.

For this assignment you will be asked to interview two people that have jobs/careers that interest you. You will also share the interests you wish to pursue and why you are choosing this path. You will have the opportunity to reflect key ideas, theories, and terms from the course materials that offer the foundation for your interests.

DIRECTIONS

1. Find two people that have jobs/careers that interest you.

2. Interview them and ask the following questions:

   a. What are the greatest communication barriers, weaknesses, or problems they see in new college graduates?

   b. What are the greatest communication challenges they see in their *own* everyday work lives?

   c. What communication advice would they given to college students to help them be more prepared for the workforce?

3. Reflect on your aspirations:

   a. What can you do to make your career opportunities strongest?

   b. How do you seek a job that is right for you in terms of time structure, tasks, and relational communication?

4. Use information from three chapters and answer:

   a. What should you take more time to learn about before venturing off?

   b. Consider *key* ideas, theories, and terms and *explain* them and why you should know *more* through classes, self-study, or just practice.

5. Write 3-5 double-spaced pages using the information you gathered from above.

6. Save your assignment as yourname_finalpaper.