

COMM 89: Theories of Communication
SUMMER 2026 Session A
Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday - 3:30 pm to 4:55 pm
Phelps Hall, 1425

Instructor

Name: Yidi Zhang

Email: yidizhang@ucsb.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-3 pm or by appointment

Office: SSMS 3311 or Zoom (by request)

Teaching Assistant

Name: Erick Garcia

Email: eag@ucsb.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3 pm or by appointment

Office: SSMS 3322 or Zoom (by request)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to provide you with an understanding of the theoretical foundations and traditions of the Communication field. We will explore the construction, evolution, and application of theories in major areas of Communication research (e.g., media, interpersonal, intergroup, and political). This course will challenge you to view communication phenomena in research and everyday life through different lenses and evaluate how different theoretical perspectives shape your understanding of human interaction processes. This course is designed to prepare you for upper-division work in the Communication major.

TEXTS

All readings posted to Canvas.

COURSE GRADING

Your grade in this course is assigned at the end of the quarter, based on the TOTAL number of points you earn for the assignments listed below. Grades will not be rounded or curved.

Assignment	Value
Exams: 3 @ 30 points each	90
In-Lecture Quizzes: 12 @ 2 Points each	24
In-Section Assignments: 4 @ 5 points each	20
Presentation in Section	16
Total	150

This is a pre-major course for the Communication major and so there are many requests at the end of the quarter to either raise the grade or lower the grade to a C- or below but grades will be based on the points you earn in the class and will not be adjusted afterward. Grades will automatically be rounded up if they are .5 away or less from the next letter grade so you don't have to email us to ask us to round up. Grades more than .5 away from the next letter grade will not be rounded up. Example: a 92.55% will be rounded up to an A but a 92.45% will receive an A-. We have to draw the line somewhere! There is ample opportunity for you to demonstrate your mastery of the concepts in the course. If any extra credit is offered, it will be announced in class and to the Canvas page and email list well in advance. Extra credit will not be offered to individual students. If any changes are made to this syllabus after the quarter begins, they will be announced as well.

Grading Distribution					
A+	98%-100%	A	93%-97%	A-	90%-92%
B+	87%-89%	B	83%-86%	B-	80%-82%
C+	77%-79%	C	73%-76%	C-	70%-72%
D+	67%-69%	D	63%-66%	D-	50%-62%
F	below 50%				

ASSIGNMENTS

Exams

- There will be 3 exams as noted on the course schedule. They will all be multiple-choice questions only. They cover the readings and class discussions/lectures. The final exam is not cumulative. There is no study guide available. Sample questions will be given from the readings prior to each lecture so you can see how I tend to ask questions and quiz yourself. Be sure to bring a pen or pencil to the exam.

In-Lecture Quizzes

- You are expected to read the reading assigned before coming to class. At the start of each class, I will give you the access code for a quiz that is posted on Canvas. It will be available during class only, not before or after class. Do not share the code with students who are not present because this is meant to track both attendance as well as ensure reading comprehension. There are 14 of these, but only 12 will count for your grade, so you can miss two with no penalty.

Discussion Section Assignments

- Section Assignments: Each student has a discussion section that meets once a week led by a qualified TA from the Communication Department. Section attendance is mandatory and will be of great benefit to you. Your TA will lead you through several exercises designed to help you learn to apply theories and understand them in more depth. You can

only earn credit for the exercises if you are in attendance, complete all of the required components, and have your exercise completed in hard copy. Most will be handwritten, so bring a pen with you to class. Work that is incomplete or poorly constructed will not earn full credit. There are 5 of these (since the last week will be presentations, which count separately), but only 4 will count for your grade so you can miss one with no penalty. You will need a blue book for these activities.

- Individual Presentations: You will choose a theory from a given list of theories (theories were not covered in lectures), and prepare a 4-minute presentation of mini theory teaching. In the presentation, you need to briefly cover the major idea/assumption(s) of the theory, use an empirical study to demonstrate it, and apply it to real-life communication. You will be graded based on how well you understand, explain, apply, and present the theory.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN MY CLASS

- Come to every class, listen attentively, and give your input on our class discussions. Your viewpoint could be interesting to others and you might disagree with what I say. This is a COMM class after all, and so participating in the communication we have is the best way for all of us to learn. Keep phones off; even vibrating ones or silent texting are distracting to neighbors.
- Take “good” notes. Good notes does not mean blindly copying what the PowerPoint says. It means writing down what you think will be important to remember later in your own words.
- Keep up on the readings. While I will cover some of the reading material in class to make sure the important points are understood, I try very hard not to insult your intelligence by lecturing straight from the text. This means you have to both read on your own and attend lecture to get the most from this class. Material from the readings that are not covered in lecture WILL be on the test.
- Study as you go. Summer session goes super fast but with a similar workload as regular quarter - which means you need to study more each week. Don’t try to cram right before the test because your working memory isn’t big enough for that and you will not do very well on the tests. Instead, try the strategies listed in my “Tips for Test Taking” on Canvas. I don’t provide a study guide because figuring out what is important from the material is part of what I want you to learn in class.

INSTRUCTIONAL POLICIES

Assignment Grading: Grades assigned by TA are final. In very rare cases, such as in situations where clear errors were made in the grading, the instructor can regrade an assignment. If students wish to appeal an assignment graded by a TA, the instructor will regrade the entire assignment based on the instructor’s independent assessment. Because the instructor might catch things missed by the TA, the assignment grade can go down if the instructor regrades it. To be clear,

grade increases are rare except in cases of very clear grading errors. If you feel the grade you received on an assignment was calculated incorrectly or contains a very clear error, you can file a grade appeal with the instructor. The appeal process consists of the following two steps. 1. Contact the instructor (through email) within 48 hours of when your assignment grade is passed back or posted on Canvas. In your email to the instructor, include a detailed description of the grading error and a substantive reason for your grade appeal—state exactly where you believe the grading error occurred in the assignment. Stating that you worked really hard on the paper and/or need a higher grade for GPA purposes are not valid reasons for an appeal and will not be considered. No regrading will be done by the instructor or TAs after an assignment has been posted for 48 hours or after finals.

Missed Assignments and Exams Policy: If you experience a significant health issue or life circumstance that interferes with your ability to complete coursework on time, you are expected to contact the instructor before the due date whenever possible. Accommodations are more feasible when communication occurs in advance. Make-up assignments or exams will be considered only when documented circumstances beyond the student's control make completion at the scheduled time impossible (e.g., serious illness, family emergency, or participation in officially recognized University activities). Appropriate documentation may be required.

- Make-up exams, when approved, may differ in format from the original exam and will typically consist of essay-based questions.
- Missing the final exam is a serious matter. In most cases, students who miss the final exam will be required to wait until the start of the following academic quarter to complete it, subject to University policies and approved documentation.
- Except in cases of serious illness, officially sanctioned University activities, or other documented emergencies, incomplete grades will not be granted.
- Students with known or recurring University obligations (e.g., athletics, academic travel) must notify the instructor within the first two weeks of the quarter to arrange accommodations.
- If you experience technical difficulties during an online quiz, you must notify the instructor before the assessment closes and provide relevant evidence (e.g., screenshots, error messages). Technical issues reported after the assessment has closed will generally not be eligible for accommodation.

Academic Honesty: All work must be the original work of the student and not turned in to any other course prior to this one. Your papers may be checked for originality using plagiarism detection software. Here is the statement on Academic Honesty from the UCSB Campus regulations document online (http://www.sa.ucsb.edu/Regulations/student_conduct.aspx): It is expected that students attending the University of California understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity, and are willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Any work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill an academic requirement must represent a

student's original work. Any act of academic dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism, will subject a person to University disciplinary action. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, looking at another student's examination, referring to unauthorized notes during an exam, providing answers, having another person take an exam for you, etc. Representing the words, ideas, or concepts of another person without appropriate attribution is plagiarism. Whenever another person's written work is utilized, whether it be a single phrase or longer, quotation marks must be used and sources cited. Paraphrasing another's work, i.e., borrowing the ideas or concepts and putting them into one's "own" words, must also be acknowledged. Although a person's state of mind and intention will be considered in determining the University response to an act of academic dishonesty, this in no way lessens the responsibility of the student.

Policy on selling my course materials: All course materials (class lectures and discussions, handouts, examinations, web materials) and the intellectual content of the course itself are protected by United States Federal Copyright Law, the California Civil Code. The UC Policy 102.23 expressly prohibits anyone from recording lectures or discussions and from distributing or selling lectures notes and all other course materials without the prior written permission of the instructor (see <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/2710530/PACAOS-100>). Students are permitted to take notes solely for their own private educational use. Exceptions to accommodate students with disabilities may be granted with appropriate documentation. To be clear, in this class students are forbidden from making/completing study guides and selling them to any person or organization.

Students requiring basic needs assistance: If you are struggling financially or otherwise, UCSB students have help available for financial emergencies, food insecurity, help for undocumented students, housing needs and a host of other issues. Resources available at UCSB: <https://basicneeds.ucsb.edu/>.

Students Requiring Disability-Related Accommodations: Students who require academic accommodations due to a documented disability must be registered with the Disabled Student Program (DSP). DSP is responsible for verifying eligibility and determining appropriate accommodations in accordance with University policy.

To ensure that approved accommodations can be implemented, it is the student's responsibility to confirm that their official accommodation information is current and visible through the DSP system and to communicate with the instructor in a timely manner.

- Students who are approved for exam-related accommodations (e.g., extended time, reader/proctor) must submit the required DSP exam request at least 10 days prior to the exam date. Requests submitted after this deadline may not be possible to accommodate.
- Accommodations are provided only after official DSP approval and are not retroactive. Please plan accordingly to ensure your access needs are met.

Policy on using AI for assignments: As tempting as it might be to use ChatGPT, Open AI, or other AI resources to do your writing assignments in this course, we believe that AI should not be used to substitute human effort, as it defeats the purpose of our educational goals, which are to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving. We want you to think about the lectures and readings, absorb them, process them, and critique them. You can't do that if you let someone or something else do your thinking for you. You can't learn from your mistakes and your classmates miss out on hearing your opinions in the discussion boards and dialoguing with you about them. Thus, we present the policy:

- The use of AI writing technologies falls within the purview of the Student Conduct Code and the Student Guide to academic integrity at UCSB (<https://dsp.ext-prod.sa.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/2020-07/academicintegflyer.pdf>). It states that “Materials (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student’s own efforts unless otherwise permitted by an instructor.” Therefore, student use of AI-assistive technology for writing is not allowed in this course. All the writing you submit must be your own work.

Course Schedule

Subject to change [last update: Jun 16, 2026]

WEEK	DAY	DATE	TOPIC	Sections
1	M	6/22	Intro to Class	
	T	6/23	Intro to Theory + Theory Evaluation	
	W	6/24	Expectancy Violations Theory	
	R	6/25		Review
2	M	6/29	Symbolic Interactionism	
	T	6/30	Uncertainty Reduction Theory	
	W	7/1	Social Info Processing Theory	
	R	7/2		Review
3	M	7/6	Exam 1	
	T	7/7	Cognitive Dissonance Theory	
	W	7/8	Dyadic Power Theory	
	R	7/9		Review Theory selection
4	M	7/13	Elaboration Likelihood Model	
	T	7/14	Communicative Constitution of Orgs	
	W	7/15	Agenda Setting theory	
	R	7/16		Review Prep for presentation
5	M	7/20	Exam 2	
	T	7/21	Cultivation	
	W	7/22	Afrocentricity	
	R	7/23		Review Prep for presentation
6	M	7/27	Communication Accommodation	
	T	7/28	Face Negotiation Theory + Review	
	W	7/29	Exam 3	
	R	7/30		Final presentations