

**COMM 601**  
**Lifespan Communication Theory and Research**  
**Fall 2012**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

---

Dr. Tom Socha

ODU University Professor, Professor of Communication, and Graduate Program Director

Course website: [www.odu.edu/~tsocha](http://www.odu.edu/~tsocha), then click on COMM 601

Email: [tsocha@odu.edu](mailto:tsocha@odu.edu)

Norfolk Office: BAL 3054, 683-3833

Virginia Beach Office: 205, 368-4114

Course Description

This course takes a developmental approach to the study of communication by exploring the culminating effects of communication as it evolves across our lifetime. Lifespan communication emphasizes the adaptive nature of human interaction across family, work, social, health, and spiritual domains. It encompasses all phases of life from childhood throughout elder adulthood and all channels of communication from nonverbal, to face-to-face, and mediated. The theory and research focus will provide students with tools to investigate and appreciate the complexities of human communication at different life stages. Lifespan Communication Theory and Research provides a survey of the topics, concepts, theories and theorists concerned with human communication across the lifespan.

We will survey foundational and contemporary theories of lifespan communication. While the class will focus on communication, theories are also drawn broadly from influential disciplines such as social and developmental psychology, gerontology, nursing, and family and human development.

As a starting point, the course will proceed from the following set of assumptions (Baltes, 1987)

- 1) Positive development occurs throughout the lifespan
- 2) Diversity and pluralism occur in the changes throughout life
- 3) Development is best viewed as a gain-loss dynamic
- 4) Inter-and intra-individual diversity exists as we progress through the lifespan
- 5) A person-environment interaction cannot be ignored in our explanations of development (in addition to face to face human communication and nonverbal communication, this includes virtual, digital, and mediated environments).

Learning Objectives

The following objectives frame the content of the course and form the basis upon which student learning is assessed.

1. Demonstrate an understanding of classic and contemporary theories of human development as applied to communication
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of communication as a lifespan developmental process
3. Demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts, primary theories, and approaches to the study of lifespan communication processes
4. Demonstrate an understanding of theories of peer-group communication
5. Demonstrate an understanding of theories of communication and aging
6. Demonstrate an understanding of ways to facilitate positive lifespan communication development
7. Demonstrate an awareness of connections between theories and concepts of lifespan communication and digital media
8. Demonstrate an awareness of some of the key elements of successful socialization as a communication professional specializing in lifespan/digital communication

### Readings

Student learning is facilitated by means of four required books (available at the university bookstore as well as numerous online resources) as well as student-selected journal articles, book chapters, and books used in class assignments. In the order they will be used in the course, these books are:

Shaw, Haxell, Weblemoe. (2012). *Communication across the Lifespan*. Oxford, UK: Oxford.

Pecchioni, L., Wright, K. B., & Nussbaum, J. (2005). *Lifespan communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sunwolf. (2008). *Peer groups: Expanding our study of small group communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harwood, J. (2007). *Understanding communication and aging*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### Assignments

The above learning objectives are realized via the readings as well as discussions and graded assignments (written and oral). Written assignments (with the exception of the curriculum vita) are to conform to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the *APA Publication Manual*, follow all applicable laws/policies concerning the ethical/legal use of copyrighted materials and the treatment of humans as participants in research. Failure to follow applicable laws/policies will result in sanctions that could include failure of the course and expulsion from the program. All assignments are given letter grades that are converted to numerical equivalents and then used in a weighted average calculation to determine the final course grade (assignment weights appear below).

- I. Lifespan Communication Short Papers:
  - A. Understanding Lifespan Communication Stages (SP-1; 15%)  
*This short paper asks students to identify and review scholarly communication resources that pertain to the understudied life-stages of childhood, adolescence, and later life.*
  - B. Communication and My Peer Cohort (SP-2; 15%)  
*This short paper asks students to reflect on human and electronic communication taking place in the year of their birth.*
  
- II. Professional Communication Development Short Assignments:
  - A. Curriculum vita (PCD-1; 5%)
  - B. Professional communication associations & Lifespan/Digital communication (PCD-2; 5%)
  
- III. Lifespan Communication Development Individual Paper and Class Lecture (Paper-25%)  
*This paper asks students to select a communication process or phenomenon and using communication and related literatures trace its lifespan developmental arc as well as consider interventions facilitative of the positive development of the chosen process/phenomenon.*
  
- IV. Midterm Exam (15%)  
A written exam of the material covered in the first half of the course.
  
- V. Final Exam (Final-20%)  
*A written exam given at the end of the course that covers the materials covered in the second half of the course..*

### Policies

Be Good Academic Citizens. Communication students and professors, as citizens of the academy, are expected to uphold high standards of conduct towards each other, to serve as agents facilitative of positive learning and to serve as positive ambassadors of the communication field. The university, college, department and communication field reward good citizenry and sanction those who choose not to uphold/follow rules that support good citizenry (e.g., engaging in unethical/un-civil/illegal behaviors).

Use Learning and Scholarly Resources Wisely and Competently. Class time, office hours, and time devoted to informal extra-curricular activities are all finite and limited resources that are made available to assist learning. It is important to make maximal, wise, and competent use of all available instructional resources. Electronic tools such as cell phones, PDA's, laptop computers, and more should always be used wisely, competently, and in socially appropriate ways. Society holds communication students and professionals are to higher than average communication competency standards.

Content Outline

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Due</b>
1 8/28	I. COMMUNICATION AS a LIFESPAN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS Foundations of Lifespan and Digital Communication		
2 9/4	A. Theoretical and Conceptual Overview	Shaw 1; Pecchioni 1; Harwood 1; Socha & Pitts *	
3 9/11	B. Overview--Peer Groups	Sunwolf 1	
4 9/18	C. Overview of Methods	Pecchioni 1	Short paper #1
5 9/25  9/27 (TH)	II Chronological Approach A. Antenatal, Birth, Neonatal  <b>Film—Tim Jeffries (Alzheimer’s’ Association)</b>	Shaw 1-3	
6 10/2	B. Childhood—Early & Middle	Shaw 4 Pecchioni 2-3; 11 Sunwolf 2	PDA #1
10/9	ODU fall Break		
7 10/16	Midterm Exam (60-minutes)  Break  C. Adolescence (90-minutes)	   Shaw 6 Pecchioni 4 Sunwolf 3	Midterm Exam
8 10/23	C. Adolescence   D. Adult-Early, Middle	Shaw 6 Pecchioni 4 Sunwolf 3  D. Adult- Early middle Shaw 7-8 Harwood 2-4 Sunwolf 5	
9 10/30	D. Adult- Early, Middle	Shaw 7-8 Harwood 2-4	Short Paper #2

	E. Adult- Later Years	Sunwolf 5  Shaw 9-10 Pecchioni 5, 12 Harwood 5-6	
10 11/6	E. Adult-Later years  III Topical Approach A. Global Cultural	Shaw 9-10 Pecchioni 5, 12 Harwood 5-6  Shaw 13-14	
11 11/13	B. Lifespan Family Communication	Shaw 11 Pecchioni 4-5	PDA #2
12 11/20	C. Lifespan Communication Skills and Relational Communication	Pecchioni 6 Shaw 15, 18-21, 25	
13 11/27	D. Social Media and Media Development	Shaw 17, 22, 23, Harwood 12	
14 12/4	IV. Frontiers of Lifespan Communication [45 minutes]  Break  Lifespan Development Paper Presentations		Lifespan Developmental Communication Paper
15 12/11	Final Exam 7 pm - 10 pm		Final Exam