

**COM 474 – Seminar in Interpersonal Communication: Narrative Relating**  
**Wednesday, 6:30-9:20**  
**FEL 116**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Professor:</b> Lindsey J. Thomas, PhD</li><li>• <b>Office Hours:</b> T/Th 2:00-3:15; by appointment</li><li>• <b>Email:</b> ljthom3@ilstu.edu (best way to reach me)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Department:</b> School of Communication, FEL 434</li><li>• <b>Office:</b> FEL 459</li><li>• <b>Phone:</b> 309-306-1315 (seriously though, email)</li></ul> |
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Advanced examination of selected areas of theory and research in interpersonal communication. May be repeated if content is different.

The purpose of this course is to examine interpersonal communication and relationships via narrative perspectives. We will examine narrative as it is employed in a variety of paradigmatic perspectives, including: normative studies (e.g., the ways in which features of narratives correlate with variables such as relational satisfaction); interpretive work (e.g., how talk/text constructs individual and relational identities); and critical as well as dialogic examinations (e.g., who is [not] allowed to tell what types of stories, given relational/cultural constraints). This class utilizes readings, discussion, and written assignments to explore and engage narrative-focused theory and research of interpersonal communication and relationships. It is (loosely – not much of life is clear-cut, perhaps especially when it comes to stories) structured first around narrative definitions/basics, then by theory (parsed-ish by paradigm, although there is overlap across/among some readings), then by method (also parsed-ish by paradigm, although there is, again, some overlap and blurring of lines).

Note: This course will engage reading and discussion of “dark side” relational phenomena including abuse, estrangement, health issues, and traumatic experience sensemaking.

**Goals**

1. Critical thinking: Think “outside the box” about interpersonal communication and relationships and, perhaps, what it means to be human
2. Cognitive complexity: Explore and practice varied approaches to garnering and producing knowledge
3. Writing & speech skills: Develop and defend graduate-level written and oral arguments/positions
4. Knowledge production: Produce original narrative-focused communication research, including reviewing extant literature, designing and implementing appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, reporting results/findings, and integrating and advancing scholarship via written and oral discussion.
5. Style: Execute APA writing style/guidelines
6. Ethics: Gain insight into and appreciation for the numerous ethical considerations in relationships and research
7. Discussion: Practice being an integral part of your and others’ learning about narrative relating via respectful interactions

If you would like assistance outside of class with achieving these goals, I welcome you to attend my office hours or make an appointment to meet with me.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Required readings will be posted on ReggieNet. You will find it much more difficult, if not impossible, to excel in this course if you do not keep up with the readings.

**OPTIONAL TEXTS:**

Although all required readings will be posted on ReggieNet, you might find it helpful to purchase the following books. Aside from the APA Manual, which I recommend having on hand for reference, we will read chapters from the following books throughout the course :

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: APA.

Baxter, L. A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN 978-1-4129-2785-7

Becker, G. (1997). *Disrupted lives: How people create meaning in a chaotic world*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press. ISBN 0-520-20914-1

Holmberg, D., Orbuch, T. L., & Veroff, J. (2004). *Thrice told tales: Married couples tell their stories*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. ISBN 0-8058-4100-8

Langellier, K. M., & Peterson, E. E. (2004). *Storytelling in daily life: Performing narrative*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. ISBN 1-59213-213-8

Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ISBN 0-674-01010-8

Riessman, C. R. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN 978-0-7619-2998-7

**COURSE WEB PAGE:** <https://reggienet.illinoisstate.edu/>

Remember to check for readings and announcements.

**COURSE PERFORMANCE & REQUIREMENTS:**

Please keep in mind that you are not “given” a grade. Rather, you earn a grade that is based on performance in seminar and on assignments. All coursework will be graded using a points-based system (detailed below). Please keep track of your own grade and standing in this course.

**COURSE EVALUATION:**

Participation, etc.	10 points
Class Leadership Day	15 points
Course Project Overview	5 points
Midterm Position Paper	15 points
Study Proposals	10 points
Narrative Project Draft	5 points
Peer Project Review	15 points
Narrative Project	25 points

**100 TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS**

**Grading Scale**

Generally in the course, *excellent/outstanding* work earns “A” grades, *good* work earns “B” grades, *average* work earns “C” grades, *below average* work earns “D” grades, and *unacceptable* work earns an “F” or “O” grade. There may be opportunities for extra credit, but you should not rely on it. The grading scale is as follows:

> 90-100% = A; 80%-89.99% = B; 70-79.99% = C; 60-69.99% = D; below 60% = F

\* I reserve the right to adjust this scale but I will only change it to the students’ advantage.

A note on course work/content: Assignments in this course are flexible to allow for tailoring to each student’s interests and to enhance students’ abilities to make decisions throughout research and writing processes; assignments are intentionally less specific than those which you might have in other courses. Please consider the APA Manual and related materials posted on ReggieNet to be extensions of the assignment criteria above. I also encourage students to refer to journal articles assigned throughout the course as examples of what completed

research papers might look like. If you would like more guidance regarding assignments, it is your responsibility to work with the instructor. If you do not appreciate the intellectual freedom granted to you in this course, remember that you have a variety of seminar options available to you.

### **Attendance, Participation, and Possible Smaller Assignments (10 points; 10% of total grade)**

Because this course is a graduate seminar, participation is essential. Attendance, demonstration of having read the material, asking questions to extend the thinking of the class and instructor, contributing relevant examples, and demonstrating respect for the contributions of classmates comprise participation. You are expected to participate in discussion, participate in oral/written critiques of readings, listen to fellow classmates, actively contribute to the collaborative learning environment, and possibly complete additional activities/exercises/quizzes both inside and outside of class. Come to class on time, prepared to talk about the assigned readings for the week and engage in class activities and discussions. Simply attending discussion section without actively contributing is not “participation.” Please read and do your best to understand the main ideas in the assigned texts before attending class so that we are able to discuss them. Truly, a graduate seminar “makes or breaks” based on discussion! Here are my ground rules for productive class discussion:

- Talk!
- Talk with each other and with me, rather than talking exclusively to or through me
- Make arguments grounded in your reading and thoughtful reflection about your reading
- Don’t be afraid to disagree with me or with each other
- Be open to others’ opinions
- Strive for topical coherence — don’t engage in topic shifts whenever there’s a change in the speaker floor
- Brevity and clarity are desirable qualities — try not to ramble, repeat yourself unnecessarily, or speak vaguely
- Enjoy yourself! (or not, I guess, but you might as well, right? I mean, we’re here anyway...)

I expect you to bring at least one question to each session for which readings have been assigned. This question should be discussion-provoking. I typically will select one student at random at the beginning of each class session to kick off discussion for the day. Come prepared.

### **Class Leadership Day (15 points; 15% of total grade)**

In pairs, students will take turns leading a day of seminar. On this day, you and a partner will choose and assign an additional scholarly reading related to that day’s topic and guide discussion, including assembling discussion questions, preparing to be “experts” on the readings and able to provide clarification and answer peers’ questions, tying the day’s topic and content to broader discussions of narrative, implementing activities if appropriate to advancing learning, etc.

### **Course Project Overview, CITI Training Certificate, & IRB Application/Approval (5 points; 5% of total grade)**

This is a written overview of your narrative project. This statement can be quite brief — one to two pages will do. State what you are going to do and the broader scholarly conversation in which the project will fit.

Please also turn in a copy of your completed CITI Training Certificate. If you have not completed the CITI Training or need to update your certification, you can find instructions for registering for the Human Subjects Research training here: <http://research.illinoisstate.edu/ethics/training/irb/index.php> (while registering, use your best judgement, and choose: “No” for CE credits; “Student Researcher – Undergraduate” for Role In Research; “Basic Human Subjects – Social and Behavioral Focus” for Which Course Do You Plan To Take?) (for the enrollment questionnaire, choose: Q1 – Educational, Social, and Behavioral research with human subjects; Q2 - None; Q3 – None; Q4 – Not at this time; Q5 – None; Q6 – None; Q7 - <check nothing>). Complete all 16 modules (yes, 16 – this will likely take longer than you anticipate). After passing the quizzes for all 16 modules, print your certificate and passing scores – *this is what you will turn in for credit.*

You should also be well on your way to garnering IRB approval for your study. Please describe where you are in this process, even if you believe your project is exempt/falls outside the purview of human subjects research (e.g., you are writing an autoethnography or garnering publicly available data from a preexisting corpus).

### **Midterm Position Paper (15 points; 15% of total grade)**

In no more than five pages, and drawing on course readings and discussions from the first seven weeks of the semester (up to and including Dialogic Theory) address the following:

- How do you define narrative?
- To which research paradigm(s) and/or theoretical approach(es) to knowing are you drawn and why?
- What is the association between narratives and relationships/relating?

This is a position paper, and as such, there is no singular “correct” answer to these questions. Instead, I am looking for your position in regards to these broad questions. State and support your position(s), citing as appropriate to your argument.

### **Study Proposals (4 Proposals: 10 points total; 10% of total grade)**

These proposals are NOT tied to your final narrative project; they are to help you think through how you might go about studying interpersonal communication/relationships using varying methods of collection and analysis. Each proposal should be tied to the topic of the day it is due and, in no more than two pages, propose a study of interest to you. Proposals will be evaluated based on topical relevance, practicality, and creativity and using a check minus/plus system individually and, later, holistically for points.

### **Peer Project Review (15 points; 15% of total grade)**

During the class session following Thanksgiving, we will be providing feedback on fellow students’ narrative projects. You will be randomly assigned to be the “lead respondent” to one paper. You must provide the student, and your instructor, with a written version of your feedback for this paper and be prepared to kickoff discussion with your main points. Engage this as a journal reviewer would: point out strengths and weaknesses and make specific suggestions for changes, both substantive and stylistic. In addition to functioning as a lead respondent, you will also contribute to the post-presentation discussion of each project.

### **Narrative Project (Draft 5 points, Final 25 points; 30% of total grade)**

This final course project is a full research study. The study must be data-based, in the broadest sense of that term; thus, you are responsible for garnering IRB approval/exemption and collecting data. The manuscript will likely be around 20-25 pages and should contain all of the sections one would expect of a paper of this kind, including:

- Title page, with running head
- Abstract page
- Manuscript body
  - Literature review: frame the scholarly conversation(s) in which the paper participates to create an *argument* for your study’s importance
    - Introduction: overview the study and its significance
    - Relevant extant literature related to topic (often by sub-section)
    - Theoretical framing
    - State RQ(s)/H(s)
  - Methods: description of participants and procedures
    - Data collection procedures
    - Data analysis approach(es)
  - Results/Findings: straightforward presentation of analysis product(s)
  - Discussion: position results/findings in broader scholarly conversation(s)
    - Brief summary

- Practical and/or theoretical contributions
- Limitations and future directions
- Conclusion (main take-aways)
- References page
- Appendices (optional)

Note: If you, for example, write an evocative narrative, these hard-and-fast sections will blur, but I expect you to still address these issues in one way or another.

Please identify on the course schedule the dates on which paper drafts are due as well as the dates for project presentations and final manuscript submissions.

**I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE WORK.** Please reference the tentative schedule for all due dates. All assignments are due in class, hard copy format, APA style (12 pt. TNR, double spaced, black font, 1" margins; ONLY the narrative project requires a title page and abstract), stapled, and error-free (PROOFREAD) unless otherwise noted. If you cannot turn something in when it is due, you must arrange (i.e., request and garner approval from the instructor) an alternate submission date *before* the due date. You are always welcome to turn papers in before the deadline.

It is impossible to make up a missed graduate seminar; thus, you should do your best to attend all classes. If you are unable to attend a class, it is your responsibility to a) attain notes and information you missed from a fellow student and b) contact me about questions (not content of whole classes) that you have regarding the material. If you are seeking an approved/excused absence, please e-mail me *before* the absence or, in the event of an emergency, as soon as possible.

#### **ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES:**

Each of the following are intended to enhance students' educational experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **Classroom Decorum**

Debates and disagreements during class discussions foster the free exchange of ideas. It is expected that we all treat each other with respect when engaging in discussions and all other classroom interactions.

#### **Technology**

If you are accessing your newfangled technological devices while in class, use them for ventures related to the course. Do not distract your classmates or your instructor.

#### **Academic Dishonesty (Cheating/Plagiarism)**

Plagiarism (using the words or ideas of others and failing to acknowledge their contribution) will not be tolerated and may result in a failing grade. Examples of plagiarism include: using the work of other students, arranging for someone else to write your assignments, rephrasing a published review or essay and presenting it as your own work/ideas, copying a review word-for-word and presenting it as your own work, using unacknowledged sources on the Internet and World Wide Web, failing to use quotation marks where needed, failing to cite sources where needed, and "recycling" essays written by other students. If you have any doubts about how to acknowledge the work of others, please pose questions in class or during an office visit with us. Refer to the University Handbook for the plagiarism policy followed in this class. That said, I credit Dr. L. Baxter, Dr. A. Miller-Ott, and Dr. J. Zompetti and thank them for their assistance in developing this syllabus.

Never turn in a paper that you did not write yourself. Never turn in a paper for this class that you wrote for another class. Never collaborate on an exam or facilitate someone else's efforts to do so. If I detect cheating or plagiarism I will reduce the student's grade on the assignment or the course or assign an F for the course.

Plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Community Rights and Responsibilities, and the instructor will meet with the student in person.

### **Grades**

All evaluations will be graded using points; please keep track of these points so that you are aware of your standing in this course. In accordance with FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) regulations, I will not post grades outside of the ISU System. Come to my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your grade(s).

I have a “24-7” policy for disputing assignment grades. This means that you must wait 24 hours before contacting me (aside from basic mathematical errors) to discuss/dispute an assignment, and you must contact me *in writing* within 7 days of the assignment being returned to dispute a grade. This policy ensures that you have time to process my feedback and that disputes take place in a timely manner. To dispute a grade, you must submit no more than a one-page argument that details your specific dispute(s) about the (in)appropriateness of the grade. I will review your request and re-grade the assignment, and we will have a face-to-face meeting to discuss our stances. Note: your grade can increase, stay the same, or decrease upon re-grading.

### **Student Access and Accommodations**

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](tel:3094385853), or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu).

### **Classroom Emergency Response**

Please review University emergency preparedness and response procedures posted in classrooms.

### **Instructor Responsibilities**

My job is to expand on ideas presented throughout the course and offer opportunities for discussions to take place about the material covered in readings and field experiences. Above all else, I am here to learn *with* you!

Please feel free to e-mail me at any time if you have questions about course materials, assignments, or other concerns related to the course. However, please note: I will likely respond only during “regular business hours” (i.e., not 4:00 AM the Sunday before an assignment is due), so plan accordingly. Do not wait until the day before an assignment is due to seek assistance. You do not need to make appointments with me to attend my office hours, so stop on by! I get lonely in there, and again, my job is literally to help you learn. Plus, there’s usually candy. If you are unable to attend office hours due to a conflict in your schedule, please set up a time to meet with me. I want you to succeed as much as you want you to succeed.

### **Final Thoughts**

I have faith that you know what is expected of you as a graduate student: come to class; don’t cheat; meet deadlines; be respectful; and so on. All of this is important, and I assume that you already know it (if you didn’t before, you do now: you’re welcome). Equally importantly, though: Just don’t be a jerk. Be good to yourself, to your peers, to your instructors... to everyone. It will serve you well in the long-run. We all have stuff going on (believe me, I know that life gets really rough sometimes), and the only way to get through it is to be kind to one another. When you need help, talk with someone. Talk with me. When someone talks with you, be compassionate. We’re all in this together.

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We’re all stories, in the end. Just make it a good one.  
The Doctor

## TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Tentative schedule subject to change without notice as instructor deems necessary)

### **Week 1 – WELCOME! Course Introduction, Paradigms of Knowing (8/21)**

- Deetz, S. (2001). Conceptual foundations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *New handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 3-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (skip org comm intro; skim the rest to understand dimensions and paradigms, starting on p. 7)
- Langellier & Peterson, Ch. 1
- Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk, 28*, 377-396.
- Freeman, M. (2006). Life “on holiday”? In defense of big stories. *Narrative Inquiry, 16*, 131-138.

### **Week 2 – Narrative Theory: Definitions, Forms, Functions (8/28)**

- Bochner, A. P. (1994). Perspectives on inquiry, II: Theories and stories. In M. L. Knapp & J.A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (pp. 21-41). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Riessman, Ch. 1
- Herman, D. (2009). Chapter 1: Getting started. In D. Herman, *Basic elements of narrative* (pp. 1-22). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ochs & Capps, Ch. 1

### **Week 3 – (Post-)Positive Narrative Theory (9/04)**

- Ochs & Capps, Chs. 5 & 6 \*SKIM for understanding\*
- McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*, 233-238.
- Koenig Kellas, J., & Manusov, V. (2003). What’s in a story? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 20*, 285-307.
- Page, R. (2010). Re-examining narrativity: Small stories in status updates. *Text & Talk, 30*, 423-444.

### **Week 4 – Interpretive Narrative Theory (9/11)**

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #1**
- Becker, Ch. 1
- Holman Jones, S. (2005). (M)othering loss: Telling adoption stories, telling performativity. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 25*, 113-135.
- Suter, E. A., & Ballard, R. L. (2009). “How much did you pay for her?”: Decision-making criteria underlying adoptive parents’ responses to inappropriate remarks. *Journal of Family Communication, 9*, 107-125.

### **Week 5 – Scholarly Writing Overview (9/18)**

- APA Style Manual

### **Week 6 – Critical Narrative Theory (9/25)**

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #2**
- Foucault, M. (1972). The discourse on language (“L’ordre du discours”). In M. Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.; pp. 215-237). New York, NY: Pantheon Books. \*SKIM\*
- Harris, M. R. & Hall, A. R. (2018). “My living shall not be in vain”: The rhetorical power of eulogies in the face of civil unrest. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric, 8*, 173-183.
- Langellier & Peterson, Ch. 6
- Lalvani, P. (2011). Constructing the (m)other. *Narrative Inquiry, 21*, 276-293.

### Week 7 – Dialogic Narrative Theory (10/02)

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #3**
- Baxter, Chs. 2 & 3
- Norwood, K. M., & Baxter, L. A. (2011). “Dear Birth Mother”: Addressivity and meaning-making in online adoption-seeking letters. *Journal of Family Communication, 11*, 198-217.

**\*Midterm Position Paper due by 5:00 PM on Friday, 10/04**

### Week 8 – (Post-)Positive Narrative Method (10/09)

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #4**
- Holmberg, Orbuch, & Veroff, Chs. 2 & 6
- Baxter, L.A., Norwood, K.M., Asbury, B., Jannusch, A., & Scharp, K. M. (2012). Narrative coherence in online stories told by members of the adoption triad. *Journal of Family Communication, 12*, 265-283.

**\*Study Proposal #1 due in class**

**\*Course Project Overview, including CITI Certificate and IRB update, due in class**

### Week 9 – Interpretive Narrative Method (10/16)

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #5**
- Riessman, Ch. 3
- Becker, Chs. 2 & 10
- Rawicki, J. & Ellis, C. (2011). Lechem hara (bad bread), lechem tov (good bread): Survival and sacrifice during the Holocaust. *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*, 155-157.
- Thomas, L. J. (2014). “Once a foster child...”: Identity construction in former foster children’s narratives. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 15*, 84-91. doi:10.1080/17459435.2014.955596

**\*Study Proposal #2 due in class**

### Week 10 – Critical Narrative Method (10/23)

- **TBD – chosen by discussion leader pair #6**
- Riessman Ch. 5
- Pederson, J. R. (2013). Disruptions of individual and cultural identities: How online stories of job loss and unemployment shift the American dream. *Narrative Inquiry, 23*, 302-322.
- Frischherz, M. (2018). *Cosmo* complaints: Reparative reading and the possibility of pleasure in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. *Sexualities, 21*, 552-568.

**\*Study Proposal #3 due in class**

### Week 11 – Dialogic Narrative Method (10/30)

- Baxter, Ch. 6
- Scharp, K. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2016). Family “bonds”: Making meaning of parent-child relationships in estrangement narratives. *Journal of Family Communication, 16*, 32-50.
- Baxter, L. A., Norwood, K. M., Asbury, B. A., & Scharp, K. M. (2014). Narrating adoption: Resisting adoption as “second best” in online stories of domestic adoption told by adoptive parents. *Journal of Family Communication, 14*, 253-269.

**\*Study Proposal #4 due in class**

**\*Narrative Project Full Draft due in class (2 copies)**



### **Week 12 – Merged Narrative Methods, Verification Procedures (11/06)**

- Scharp, K. M., Paxman, C. G., & Thomas, L. J. (2016). “I want to go home”: Homesickness experiences and support-seeking practices. *Environment and Behavior*, 48, 1175-1197.
- Thomas – foster narratives merged-methods draft
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. In Y. S. Lincoln & E. Guba, *Naturalistic inquiry* (pp. 289-331). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

### **Week 13 – Workday (NCA Annual Convention, Baltimore, MD) (11/13)**

I will be in Baltimore for NCA, so we will not hold class on this day. I strongly recommend using this time to work on your peer project review, if you have not already completed this assignment.

### **Week 14 – Presentations (11/20)**

Each student is required to complete two presentations, of sorts:

- As an *author*: prepare a single-page handout and brief (approximately 4-minute) verbal overview of your project. Set the class up to give you feedback that you need/want as you move the project toward your final draft for this class.
- As a *peer reviewer*: prepare a brief (approximately 2-minute) response (as a conference respondent might) to your assigned manuscript, based on your written review, that will kickoff the discussion of each paper.

**\*Project Presentation due**

**\*Peer Project Review due in class (2 copies)**

### **Week 15 – TBD (12/04)**

**\*Narrative Project Full Manuscript due by 12:00 noon on Friday, 12/06**