**16:194:672: Uncertainty and Communication**

Spring 2013

Tuesdays 6:20 – 9:00pm

SCI 203

Professor: Jennifer Theiss

Office: 207 SCI

Phone: 848-932-8719

Email: [jtheiss@rutgers.edu](mailto:jtheiss@rutgers.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00 – 5:00pm

**Course Overview**

Nearly four decades ago, Charles Berger identified uncertainty as an influential factor in shaping communication during initial interaction. In the intervening years, the concept of uncertainty has been researched from a variety of different perspectives and applied to myriad communication contexts. Scholars have identified various sources of uncertainty and have expanded definitions of the construct to include different forms of insecurity, ambiguity, and doubt. Research has also documented associations between uncertainty and various aspects of the communication process, including information seeking, message production, and message processing. In this course, we will examine the well-established foundations of theory and research on uncertainty. We will also explore contemporary applications of uncertainty in interpersonal, relational, health, mediated, and organizational communication contexts.

**Course Learning Objectives**

After completing this course, students should be able to:

* Demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the literature on uncertainty and communication.
* Discuss theory and research on uncertainty and communication in a scholarly environment.
* Describe the ways in which uncertainty is conceptualized and researched in various communication contexts.
* Develop a study designed to examine uncertainty in some communication context.

**Course Requirements**

**Participation (15 points)**

Student participation is crucial to the operation of this course. Students are expected to engage course material each week in seminar discussions. Developing an ability to articulate your ideas to others is an important skill that seminar discussions allow you to practice. It is equally important to realize that your fellow students will learn from the things you say and from the need to form responses to the things you say. In other words, the whole class benefits to the extent that individual members are active participants.

**Uncertainty in Context Papers (30 points)**

You are required to write TWO papers that reflect on the literature on uncertainty in one of the five contexts we are investigating this semester (ie., interpersonal communication, relationships, health, mediated, and organizational). These papers should provide an integrative summary of assigned readings for the relevant unit (and may include additional readings if applicable) and reflect on (a) the current state of uncertainty as a construct in that context and (b) future directions for expanding the uncertainty construct in that context. You may choose which units you want to write context papers for. Each context paper is worth 15 points and is due in class in the week following the end of the unit on your chosen context.

**Research Proposal (55 points)**

Your final paper in this course asks you to examine uncertainty in relation to some context or phenomenon that interests you. The goal of this assignment is to produce a theoretically grounded rationale for exploring associations between uncertainty and some other communication phenomenon that interests you and to propose a study designed to investigate these associations. The paper will be completed in two stages:

*Stage 1: Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography* (10 points)

The goal of the proposal is to provide an explication of the phenomenon you intend to examine in relation to uncertainty and to explain why you believe uncertainty is relevant to this phenomenon. “Explication” is more than just a simple definition; it is a careful analysis of the labels attached to a phenomenon, the meaning of the labels, the operationalizations of the phenomenon, and the scope, specificity, and contextual elements that define the phenomenon. Students should make ample use of existing research to clarify how the phenomenon has been conceptualized in the literature and how uncertainty may be related to the phenomenon. In addition to the resources cited in explicating the phenomenon, Stage 1 should include a separate bibliography of resources to be explored in developing the rest of the paper. Stage 1 is due in class on March 12.

*Stage 2: Final Paper and Study Proposal* (40 points)

The final paper should include a thorough literature review on your chosen phenomenon that (a) explicates your phenomenon, (b) demonstrates the ways in which uncertainty is implicated in the phenomenon, and (c) advances research questions or hypotheses to be investigated in your proposed study. The paper should also include a proposed research method for exploring your hypotheses and research questions. The method section should include enough detail about the study that you could conceivably carry out the investigation at the end of this course. Stage 2 is due in class on April 30.

*Final Paper Presentation* (5 points)

Each student will give a 10 minute presentation their final paper on the last day of class. Presentations can be informal, but you may include a powerpoint presentation if you wish.

*MCIS Alternatives*

If you are a masters student in this course, you have the option of (a) completing the final paper as described, (b) completing the final paper as described with a partner, or (c) completing the final paper independently without proposing a method section.

**Course Schedule**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | **Topic** | **Assigned Readings** |
| Jan  22 | Introductions & Course Overview |  |
| Jan  29 | Conceptualizations of Uncertainty | Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research 1,* 99–112.  Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2002a). Information seeking beyond initial interaction: Negotiating relational uncertainty within close relationships. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 243-257.  Afifi, W. A. (2010). Uncertainty and information management in interpersonal contexts. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research* (pp. 94-114). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  Goldsmith, D. J. (2001). A normative approach to the study of uncertainty and communication. *Journal of Communication, 51*, 514-533.  McCormick, K. M. (2002). A concept analysis of uncertainty in illness. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 34*, 127-131. |
|  | **Perspectives on Uncertainty in Interpersonal Contexts** | |
| Feb  5 | Uncertainty Reduction Theory | Knobloch, L. K. (2008b). Uncertainty reduction theory: Communicating under conditions of ambiguity. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories of interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 133-144). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  Parks, M. R., & Adelman, M. B. (1983). Communication networks and the development of romantic relationships: An expansion of uncertainty reduction theory. *Human Communication Research, 10,* 55-79.  Berger, C. R., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1991). Uncertainty and communication. In B. Dervin & M. J. Voight (Ed.), *Progress in communication science* (Vol. 10, pp. 21-66). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.  Douglas, W. (1991). Expectations about initial interaction: An examination of the effects of global uncertainty. *Human Communication Research, 17,* 355-384.  Douglas, W. (1994). The acquaintanceship process: An examination of uncertainty, information seeking, and attraction during initial conversation. *Communication Research, 21,* 154-176. |
| Feb  12 | Predicted Outcome Value Theory | Sunnafrank, M. (1986a). Predicted outcome value during initial interactions: A reformulation of uncertainty reduction theory. *Human Communication Research, 13,* 3-33.  Berger, C. R. (1986). Uncertain outcome values: Uncertainty reduction theory then and now. *Human Communication Research, 13,* 34-38.  Sunnafrank, M. (1986b). Predicted outcome values: Just now and then? *Human Communication Research, 13,* 39-40.  Sunnafrank, M. (1990). Predicted outcome value and uncertainty reduction theories: A test of competing perspectives. *Human Communication Research, 17,* 76-103.  Sunnafrank, M., & Ramirez, A. (2004). At first sight: Persistent relational effects of get-acquainted conversations. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21,* 361-379.  Ramirez, A., Sunnafrank, M., & Goei, R. (2010). Predicted Outcome Value Theory in ongoing relationships. *Communication Monographs, 77*, 27-50. |
| Feb  19 | Theory of Motivated Information Management | Afifi, W. A., & Weiner, J. L. (2004). Toward a theory of motivated information management. *Communication Theory, 14,* 167-190.  Afifi, W. A., & Weiner, J. L. (2006). Seeking information about sexual health: Applying the theory of motivated information management. *Human Communication Research, 32,* 35-57.  Afifi, W. A., & Afifi, T. D. (2009). Avoidance among adolescents in conversations about their parents’ relationship: Applying the theory of motivated information management. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26,* 488-511.  Afifi, W. A., & Morse, C. R. (2009). Expanding the role of emotion in the theory of motivated information management. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions* (pp. 87-105). New York: Routledge.  Fowler, C., & Afifi, W. A. (2011). Applying the theory of motivated information management to adult children’s discussions of caregiving with aging parents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28,* 507-535. |
|  | **Perspectives on Uncertainty in Relationships** | |
| Feb  26 | Conceptualizing Relational Uncertainty | Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (1999). Measuring the sources and content of relational uncertainty. *Communication Studies, 50,* 261-278.  Knobloch, L. K. (2010). Relational uncertainty and interpersonal communication. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research* (pp. 69-93). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2002). Intimacy and the magnitude and experience of episodic relational uncertainty within romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships, 9,* 457-478.  Knobloch, L. K. (2008a). The content of relational uncertainty within marriage. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 25,* 467-495.  Knobloch, L. K., & Satterlee, K. L. (2009). Relational uncertainty: Theory and application. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 106-127)*.* New York: Routledge.  Theiss, J. A., & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Parsing the mechanisms that increase relational intimacy: The effects of uncertainty amount, open communication about uncertainty, and the reduction of uncertainty. *Human Communication Research, 34,* 625-654.  **CONTEXT PAPER ON INTERPERSONAL UNIT DUE** |
| March 5 | Relational Turbulence Model | Solomon, D. H., & Theiss, J. A. (2008). A longitudinal test of the relational turbulence model of romantic relationship development. *Personal Relationships, 15,* 339-357.  Solomon, D. H., Weber, K. M., & Steuber, K. R. (2010). Turbulence in relational transitions. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research* (pp. 115-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2010). An actor-partner interdependence model of relational turbulence: Cognitions and emotions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27,* 595-619.  Theiss, J. A.,Estlein, R., & Weber, K. M. (in press). A longitudinal assessment of relationship characteristics that predict new parents’ relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships.*  Theiss, J. A., & Knobloch, L. K. (in press). Relational turbulence during the post-deployment transition: Relational maintenance, partner responsiveness, and appraisals of turmoil. *Communication Research.* |
| March 12 | Uncertainty and Message Production | Berger, C. R. (1997). Message production under uncertainty. In G. Philipsen & T. L. Albrecht (Eds.), *Developing communication theories* (pp. 29-55). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.  Knobloch, L. K. (2006). Relational uncertainty and message production within courtship: Features of date request messages. *Human Communication Research, 32,* 244-273.  Knobloch, L. K., & Carpenter-Theune, K. E. (2004). Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: Associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research, 31,* 173-205.  Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Relational uncertainty and relationship talk within courtship: A longitudinal actor-partner interdependence model. *Communication Monographs, 78,* 3-26*.*  Theiss, J. A. (2011). Modeling dyadic effects in the associations between relational uncertainty, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction for husbands and wives. *Communication Research, 38,* 565-584*.*  Knobloch, L. K., Knobloch-Fedders, L. M., & Durbin, C. E. (2011). Depressive symptoms and relational uncertainty as predictors of reassurance-seeking and negative feedback-seeking in conversation. *Communication Monographs, 78,* 437-462.  **STAGE 1 OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE** |
| March  19 | **SPRING BREAK!** | |
| March 26 | Uncertainty and Message Processing | Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2005). Relational uncertainty and relational information processing: Questions without answers? *Communication Research, 32,* 349-388.  Knobloch, L. K., Miller, L. E., Bond, B. J., & Mannone, S. E. (2007). Relational uncertainty and message processing in marriage. *Communication Monographs, 74,* 154-180.  Theiss, J. A., Knobloch, L. K., Checton, M., & Magsamen-Conrad, K. (2009). Relationship characteristics associated with the experience of hurt in romantic relationships: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Human Communication Research, 35,* 588-615*.*  Gudykunst, W. B., & Nishida, T. (2001). Anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived effectiveness of communication across relationships and cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 25,* 55-71.  Theiss, J. A., & Nagy, M. E. (in press). A relational turbulence model of partner responsiveness and relationship talk across cultures. *Western Journal of Communication.* |
|  | **Perspectives on Uncertainty in Health Contexts** | |
| April  2 | Illness Uncertainty & Problematic Integration Theory | Babrow, A. S., Kasch, C. R., & Ford, L. A. (1998). The many meanings of uncertainty in illness: Toward a systematic accounting. *Health Communication, 10,* 1-23.  Babrow, A. S. (2001). Uncertainty, value, communication, and problematic integration. *Journal of Communication, 51*, 553-573.  Gill, E. A., & Babrow, A. S. (2007). To hope or to know: Coping with uncertainty and ambivalence in women’s magazine breast cancer articles. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 35,* 133-155.  Hines, S. C., Babrow, A. S., Badzek, L., & Moss, A. (2001). From coping with life to coping with death: Problematic integration for the seriously ill elderly. *Health Communication, 13*, 327-340.  Checton, M. G., & Greene, K. (2012). Beyond initial disclosure: The role of prognosis and symptom uncertainty in patterns of disclosure in relationships. *Health Communication, 27,* 145-157.  Checton, M. G., Greene, K., Magsamen-Conrad, K., & Venetis, M. K. (2012). Patients’ and partners’ perceptions of chronic illness and its management. *Families, Systems, & Health, 30,* 114-129.  **CONTEXT PAPER ON RELATIONSHIPS UNIT DUE** |
| April  9 | Uncertainty Management Theory | Brashers, D. E. (2001). Communication and uncertainty management. *Journal of Communication, 51*, 477-497.  Brashers, D. E., Goldsmith, D. J., & Hsieh, E. (2002). Information seeking and avoiding in health contexts. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 258-271.  Hogan, T. P., & Brashers, D. E. (2009). The theory of communication and uncertainty management: Implications from the wider realm of information behavior. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions* (pp. 45-66). New York: Routledge.  Brashers, D.E., Neidig, J. L., Hass, S. M., Dobbs, L. K., Cardillo, L. W., & Russell, J. A. (2000). Communication in the management of uncertainty: The case of persons living with HIV or AIDS. *Communication Monographs, 67,* 63-84.  Brashers, D. E., Neidig, J. L., & Goldsmith, D. J. (2004). Social support and the management of uncertainty for people living with HIV or AIDS. *Health Communication, 16,* 305-331. |
|  | **Perspectives on Uncertainty in Organizational Contexts** | |
| April 16 | Uncertainty and Organizational Communication | Kramer, M. W. (2009). Managing uncertainty in work interactions. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 164-181). New York: Routledge.  Kramer, M. W. (1993). Communication and uncertainty reduction during job transfers: Leaving and joining processes. *Communication Monographs, 60,* 178-198.  Johnson, J. D. (2009). Information regulation in work life: Applying the comprehensive model of information seeking to organizational networks. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 182-199). New York: Routledge.  Bordia, P., Hobman, E., Jones, E., Gallois, C., & Callan, V. J. (2004). Uncertainty during organizational change: Types, consequences, and management strategies. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 18,* 507-532.  Allen, J., Jimmieson, N. L, Bordia, P., & Irmer, B. E. (2007). Uncertainty during organizational change: Managing perceptions through communication. *Journal of Change Management, 7,* 187-2010.  **CONTEXT PAPER ON HEALTH UNIT DUE** |
|  | **Perspectives on Uncertainty in Mediated Communication Contexts** | |
| April 23 | Uncertainty and Online Communication | Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Lai, C. H. (2010). First comes love, then comes Google: An investigation of uncertainty reduction strategies and self-disclosure in online dating. *Communication Research, 38,* 70-100.  Antheunis, M. J., Schouten, A. P., Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2012). Interactive uncertainty reduction strategies and verbal affection in computer mediated communication. *Communication Research, 39,* 757-780.  Tidwell, L. C. & Walther, J. B. (2002). Computer-mediated communication effects on disclosure, impressions, and interpersonal evaluations: Getting to know one another a bit at a time. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 317-348.  Ramirez, A., Walther, J. B., Burgoon, J. K., & Sunnafrank, M. (2002). Information seeking strategies, uncertainty, and computer mediated communication: Toward a conceptual model. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 213-228.  Ramirez, A. (2009). The effect of interactivity on initial interactions: The influence of information seeking role on computer-mediated interaction. *Western Journal of Communication, 73,* 300-325.  **CONTEXT PAPER ON ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT DUE**  **(CONTEXT PAPERS ON MEDIATED UNIT DUE MAY 7)** |
| April 30 | **Final Paper Presentations** | |