

COMM 373: Narratives and Health

Spring 2020

Professor: Dr. Jody (Koenig) Kellas
Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:45, Teachers College 250
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Course website: www.my.unl.edu (Canvas)

Required texts: Esfahani Smith, E. (2017). *The power of meaning. Finding fulfillment in a world obsessed with happiness*. New York: Broadway Books.

Brown, B. (2015). *Rising strong. How the ability to reset transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. New York: Random House.

Additional required readings will be available on Canvas.

Mission of Department of Communication Studies

The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-face to digital media contexts. The department's research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.

Course Description & Objectives

The purpose of *Narratives and Health* is to illuminate for students the link between a pervasive form of everyday and consequential communication – storytelling – and health and well-being. Research suggests that humans are storytelling creatures who make sense of their lives through narrative features, reasoning, and communication. The stories people hear and tell affect and reflect individual and relational identity; socialize individuals and groups to norms, values, beliefs, and behavior; enable sense-making, coping, and catharsis in light of difficulty and illness; and facilitate human connection. The ways in which those stories are framed, told, and interpreted over time shapes the way we think, behave, feel, and relate. At its core, this class is about teaching students the significant ways in which narratives and storytelling affect and reflect our quality of life and enable them to translate those findings into individual and relational well-being and improvements for themselves and others.

Communication Studies 373 is therefore dedicated to understanding the intersections between narratives, health, and communication. Specifically, through readings, in-class lecture, discussion, assignments, and experiential activities, this class will explore the theory, research, and skills associated with narratives and health through a communication lens. We will begin by

understanding the need for narrative in the context of health and personal relationships and the science behind linking storytelling and health. We will proceed by exploring the ramifications of the functions of storytelling across a variety of relational and health contexts.

By the end of this course you will:

- Understand and articulate the the centrality of narratives and storytelling as communication processes central to human lives, health, and well-being.
- Define narrative, health communication, and interpersonal communication and the dialogic and aesthetic intersections between them.
- Learn, articulate, and critique the science linking storytelling and health.
- Understand the centrality of sense- and meaning-making in the link between storytelling and health; be able to innovate ways to incorporate meaning into your own and others' lives.
- Apply your knowledge of narrative approaches to your own stories/health and in service to/engagement with others.
- Synthesize and evaluate theoretical and empirical approaches to narrative care and propose a translational storytelling intervention designed to build communities of meaning and improve others' health and well-being.

You will demonstrate proficiency of these skills by:

- Performing well on regular reading quizzes and two exams and application papers
- Taking part in class discussions and activities
- Engaging with each other and me through narrative pedagogy
- Writing a final paper that synthesizes your understanding of empirical and theoretical approaches to narratives and storytelling and proposing a translational storytelling intervention the promotes well-being in a relationship or community that matters to you.

Expectations

The contributions that we bring to the classroom will largely affect the quality of the learning that takes place. I teach best and the content of this course will emerge most fruitfully when students are actively engaged in the learning process. This means that as students I expect you to be present both physically and mentally, engage in classroom discussion, complete assigned work by the due date, and help create a classroom environment that is supportive, sensitive, and respectful to all members.

Because this is a course about interpersonal, family, and health communication, we will often discuss materials and experiences of a personal nature. Personal examples will help us to effectively apply and understand the course content, but may also at times challenge our comfort zones. In order to foster a classroom environment in which our discussions and personal application will benefit our understanding, we must work together to make it a safe and respectful forum. I expect everyone in the class to respect others' rights to speak, to listen attentively to what is said, and to use discretion and sensitivity when speaking. If you have questions or concerns about this element of the course, I encourage you to bring them up in class or talk to me individually.

Course Requirements and Grading

You final grade will be based on the following assignments:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Narrative pedagogy appointment	10 points (credit/no credit)
Life Story paper	50 points
Midterm Exam	100 points
Involvement	50 points
Reading Quizzes	50 points (10 quizzes at 5 points each)
Parallel Blogs	30 points (3 at 10 points each)
Final Paper Proposal	10 points (credit/no credit)
Final Paper	100 points
<u>Final Exam</u>	<u>100 points</u>
TOTAL	500 points

Grades will be based on the following scale:

500-483 = A+	482-468 = A	467-448 = A-	447-433 = B+
432-413 = B	412-398 = B-	397-383 = C+	382-368 = C
367-348 = C-	347-333 = D+	332-318 = D	317-298 = D-
Below 298 = F			

Assignment/Exam Description

Narrative Pedagogy Appointment

At the beginning of the semester, you will be introduced to the practice of narrative pedagogy (NP) and take part in a **narrative pedagogy appointment**. During the first class period, you and your classmates will meet with each other to tell your stories, listening with compassion and care to learn more about each other as students, people, and communicators. After listening to your classmates, you will write up and share with them one of their stories. You will also sign up for a narrative pedagogy appointment with me outside of class. These will be 15-minute meetings. I will write up your story from our one-one-one meeting. These are designed to build rapport between members of the class to facilitate better learning.

Class Involvement:

This class is designed for active student participation. Your involvement is what will bring meaning and make this class worthwhile to you and to others. I am looking for **quality** involvement, not just quantity. This means that I want you to engage fully in class discussion and listen actively to others. Participation in activities, asking questions, and integrating reading materials into class discussion also serve as quality involvement.

Involvement includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Attending class regularly and on time (you are expected to attend all classes for the duration of the class period); attendance will make up 25 points of your involvement grade, thus regular attendance is very important.
- Being focused and practicing good listening skills

- Contributing to group discussion and taking part meaningfully in in-class conversations and activities (i.e., staying on task, taking in-class work seriously)
- Participating relevantly and actively in class exercises
- Visiting office hours to talk with me about class concepts, skills, and issues
- Relating class material to the “outside” world
- Not monopolizing discussion or discrediting others
- Demonstrating your understanding of course concepts as they apply to your in-class communication

In-Class Reading Quizzes

These quizzes are designed to ensure that you are completing the reading and engaging in active learning and critical thinking about course concepts outside of class. They are also designed to help you prepare for the exams in manageable increments. Quizzes will be open-note, which means if you take notes on the reading prior to that day’s class, you may use your notes to assist you in taking the quiz. Notes must be originals (not photocopied) and in your own handwriting or, if typed, should be printed out and not duplicative of anyone else’s notes. Quizzes will NOT be open book. Quizzes will be multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true-false, or essay. **You may NOT make up reading quizzes for any reason.**

Papers & Parallel Blogs

Over the course of the semester, you will make sense of course content through various application in-class assignments (Tree of Life, Narrative Mapping, Rising Strong) and outside of class papers (Life Story paper, Parallel Blogs, Final Paper).

Life Story Paper. In order to facilitate your learning about the identity building function of narratives and storytelling, you will engage in an abbreviated version of Dan McAdams’ life story interview protocol in which you and another person (a classmate, a friend, a loved one or family member) will interview each other on significant life stories. In this paper, you will summarize your interview experience, link the process and content of the stories to course concepts, and reflect on what you learned from the process and in relation to relevant theories.

Parallel Blogs. Building off approaches developed in the field of Narrative Medicine (Charon, 2006), you will complete three Parallel Blog posts about the book *Rising Strong* during this unit of the course. *Parallel* refers to writing from both an academic/critical scholarly perspective and a personal narrative perspective. Parallel Blogs, therefore, are those that (a) provide a public blog reflection on the reading assigned for the day and (b) a private narrative reflection on how the readings resonate with your own personal experiences. In order to facilitate the most engaged classroom discussion, you will comment on at least one other person’s blog before our class meeting. **Blogs are due by 8 AM the day on which they are listed on the syllabus.**

Final Paper. The final paper is designed to showcase what you have learned through research, theory, practice, discussion, and reflection on a narrative approach to care. In this paper, you will synthesize what you’ve learned across the semester to analyze the importance of storytelling’s link to well-being in a context that is meaningful to you. You will review research, apply what you’ve learned about the social science of storytelling, pillars of meaning, and the rising strong process to

design a translational storytelling application meant to improve well-being and build cultures of meaning.

Assignment sheets outlining specific expectations for above assignments will be given during the semester.

Exams

There will be a midterm and final exam which test your knowledge of narrative communication concepts across units. The exams will be most likely in essay format and essay questions will be given in advance of the exam.

Course Policies

Late Papers and Make-up Work: Late papers are not generally accepted and will only be considered for what I consider to be **emergency** situations. **You must discuss these with me at least 24 hours prior to the due date.** If I choose to accept an overdue paper, it will receive a grade deduction of 10% for each day late (calendar days, including weekends). No late work will be accepted one week after due date. The **final exam, reading quizzes, and application days** cannot be made up.

In-Class Etiquette and Electronics Policy: Your timely presence is required in this course. Tardiness is disruptive to your fellow students and me. Please be sure to turn cell phones off before entering the classroom, stow them for the remainder of the class, and avoid talking to your peers during class lecture and discussion. Because of the size and nature of this course, I am enforcing a **no electronics/laptop policy** this semester. Believe me, I prefer typing over taking hand-written notes too. However, research shows that your engagement and retention of material increases with hand-written notes, and I have increasingly found the temptations of a screen detract from classroom engagement and learning, even with the most dedicated students (and faculty). Thus, please leave your laptops at home or put them away when class begins.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Course Credit: Students taking this class pass-fail and Communication Studies majors must earn a grade of 74% (C) or better to receive credit for this course.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and grounds for university action. According to the University's Undergraduate Bulletin (2013-2014), plagiarism is considered an act of Academic Dishonesty and is defined as, but not limited to "Presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source) and submitting examinations, theses, reports, speeches, drawings, laboratory notes or other academic work in whole or in part

as one's own when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person.” Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an “F” grade and may be grounds for failing the course. It is the policy of the Department of Communication Studies to file a report with the Dean of Students for any infraction (no matter how minor it may seem). It is your responsibility as a student to familiarize yourself with and adhere to these guidelines (see <http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code> for the university policies and descriptions of all academic dishonesty and <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/integrity#plagiarism> for helpful tips on avoiding plagiarism). It is my responsibility to report any cases of cheating or plagiarism to the administration. All assignments must be your own original work and must be prepared specifically for this course.

Tentative Course Schedule

*Indicates readings available on Canvas

Date	Content	Readings	Assignment Due
T 1/14	Introduction to the Course		
Foundations: Why Do Narratives & Storytelling Matter?			
Th 1/16	Pervasive	*Koenig Kellas, Ch. 1 (in process)	<i>Reading Quiz 1</i>
T 1/21	Linked to health and well-being	*Harter, Ch. 1	
Th 1/23	Linked to health and well-being	*Koenig Kellas (2018)	<i>Reading Quiz 2</i>
T 1/28	Pillars of a meaningful life	The Power of Meaning, Introduction and Ch. 1	
Th 1/30	Pillars of a meaningful life	The Power of Meaning, Chs. 2 & 3	<i>Reading Quiz 3</i>
Functions of Narratives & Storytelling			
Creating Identity			
T 2/4	Life Stories	The Power of Meaning, Ch. 4	
Th 2/6	Life Stories	*McAdams (1993)	<i>Reading Quiz 4</i>
T 2/11	Illness Narratives	*Frank	
Th 2/13	Narrative Therapy & <i>The Tree of Life Application</i>	*White (2007)	<i>Reading Quiz 5</i>
Humanizing Medicine & Healthcare			
T 2/18	Narrative Medicine	*Charon (2009)	<i>Reading Quiz 6</i>
Th 2/20	Aesthetic Approaches: Film	*Harter, Ch. 2	Life Story Paper Due
T 2/25	Aesthetic Approaches: Arts-based storytelling	*Willer (2019) *Willer et al. (2018)	<i>Reading Quiz 7</i>
Th 2/27	Aesthetic Approaches: Transcendence	The Power of Meaning, Ch. 5	

T 3/3	<i>Narrative Mapping Application – Guest facilitator TBA</i>		
Th 3/5	Midterm Exam		
Making Sense & Coping			
T 3/10	Growth, Resilience, Catharsis & Control	The Power of Meaning, Ch. 6	
Th 3/12	Reframing Difficulty: Rising Strong	Rising Strong, Introduction, Chs. 1-4	Parallel Blog 1 Due
T 3/17	Reframing Difficulty: Rising Strong <i>Rising Strong Application</i>	Rising Strong, Chs. 5-7	Parallel Blog 2 Due
Th 3/19	Reframing Difficulty: Rising Strong	Rising Strong, Chs. 8-11	Parallel Blog 3 Due
T 3/24	SPRING BREAK		
Th 3/26	SPRING BREAK		
T 3/31	Interactional Sense-Making in Families	*Trees & Koenig Kellas (2009)	
Th 4/2	Narrative Grieving	*Pangborn (2019)	<i>Reading Quiz 8</i>
T 4/7	Collaboratively Constructing Health in Families	*Aleman & Helfrich (2014)	Paper proposals due
Socializing & Reducing Risk			
Th 4/9	Drug Resistance	*Hecht & Miller-Day	
T 4/14	Social Aggression		
Th 4/16	Sexual Risk-Taking	*Holman & Koenig Kellas (2018)	<i>Reading Quiz 9</i>
Socializing & Community-Building			
T 4/21	Cultures of Meaning	The Power of Meaning, Ch. 7 & conclusion	
Th 4/23	Narrative Parenting	*Koenig Kellas et al. (2019)	<i>Reading Quiz 10</i>
T 4/28	Palliative Care	*Reading TBD	
Th 4/30	Final Project Presentations		Final Paper Due

Final Exam: Friday, May 8, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM