Description:
COMM 470 “Advanced Interpersonal Communication” (3 credits) meets twice a week (Tuesday/Thursday) in 75-minute segments for 15 weeks, and a 2-hour final examination. Online delivery contains extensive written content as well as audio-visual presentations and exercises that includes the same information students in a face-to-face lecture course receive, requiring students to engage the online modules for at least three hours per week. Students are expected to take two exams as well as a final examination. Students will complete daily readings and listening activities, graded discussions, regular application and analytical activities, and an extensive research paper. Students will also present their ideas in a formal presentation. A student can expect to spend 6 hours each week preparing outside of classroom hours.

A whole course devoted to lying and deception? I know what you’re thinking, but, unfortunately, this class isn’t about how to lie and/or deceive. But it’s not a course in ethics or morality either—no universal claims will be made about how people who lie and deceive are evil and bad. Doubtless, many who practice deception are evil and/or bad, but lies and other deceptive acts are sometimes rightly carried out by very nice people acting out of very benevolent motives.

The reality (or the truth?) is considerably more complex than we were led to believe as children. As we will discover in this course, lies and other forms of deception represent communicative strategies that are, in and of themselves, neutral. Like any human tool, lying and deceiving can be used for ill or for good, to benefit oneself alone or mercifully aid others. And like all other communication strategies, it’s the outcome—the impact—of the act that matters most. Not all lies are created equal.

Deception in all its forms has been a hallmark of our species almost from the beginning, and it continues to be front-page news even today. In this course we’ll explore the nature of lying, its manifestations, its uses and misuses, its development historically and culturally, and the vagaries of lie detection (sorry, there’s no sure-fire method for telling if someone is lying—if there were, we’d all know about it and lying itself would have all but disappeared by now).

If the course has an overarching goal, it’s this: Not to make you cynical about the world in which we live, but to help you be more skeptical, savvier consumers of the world of human communication that surrounds you. In order to do that, it’s necessary to rattle the cages a little bit and get you to re-examine things we often take for granted as well as explore previously unknown territory. This course is not for the faint of heart—some of the reading can be quite dense at times and we’ll occasionally see and talk about things that might be a little disturbing.

Overview: This course is not writing-intensive (some interviews and writeups) but is somewhat media-intensive—quite a bit of reading, watching video clips (both in and sometimes outside of class), and a lot of good old-fashioned thinking along with in-class discussion.

Course Structure: My lectures will proceed from the assumption that you have prepared for class by reading and thinking about the book chapter, article, and/or video(s) I assigned for a particular day. However, my lectures will not replicate the reading or viewing of assignments. But please do bring up questions if you have difficulties with them.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course. Using the words and ideas of others is borrowing something from those individuals. It is always necessary to identify the original source of supporting information;
you must cite the source of any material, quoted or paraphrased, used in your presentation. The absence of this documentation constitutes plagiarism – a serious academic and professional offense. Proper documentation requires a bibliography of any outside texts you have consulted including both traditional sources and on-line sources.

Your ethical responsibility as a student is to distinguish between what are your thoughts and ideas and what is not, and to credit those who have contributed to your presentation. Putting your name on a piece of work indicates that the work is yours and that the praise or criticism is due to you and no one else. Putting your name on a piece of work in which any part is not yours, is plagiarism – unless the borrowed thought or wording is clearly marked and the work is fully identified. Keep in mind that plagiarism is a form of theft. Taking words, phrasing, or sentence structure, or any other element of another person’s ideas, and using them as if they were your own, is stealing. Simply paraphrasing the work of another without acknowledging the information source is also plagiarism. Merely restating another individual’s ideas in different words does not make the ideas yours. ALL assignments are to be your original work.

If you are caught being dishonest, you will be given a “0” for the assignment and/or the course depending on the severity of the offense. To avoid getting into trouble for academic dishonesty, please visit the following websites and read-up:

http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/4.1-student-academic-dishonesty.pdf

Students with Disabilities: “To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/

Acceptable Student Behavior: “Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

Assignments:

Weekly Quizzes: Your understanding of the topics covered in the readings and discussed in class will be assessed in 10 weekly quizzes; there is no mid-term or final examination in this course. Quizzes will take place from 12:35 to 12:45 on Thursdays. You will not be granted extra time for the quiz if you show up late for class, regardless of your excuse. Each quiz will assess your memory for the readings assigned and topics discussed in class sessions prior to the last quiz, including the readings assigned for the day of the quiz. You will not be allowed to make up a missed quiz under any circumstances whatsoever.

Attendance & Participation: Discussion is vital to the classroom experience, therefore participation scores will be determined by attendance and contributions to the classroom discussion. I will take attendance regularly and everyone starts off with 30 points. You’re allowed three (3) unexcused absences total for the semester (exams and assignments are still due when they’re due regardless). Beyond that, 2 points will be deducted against your participation score per absence. So if you want full credit, read the text, show up on time, ask questions, and offer considerate comments and our classroom will benefit from your presence.
**Chapter Chats:** In an effort to generate discussion and encourage understanding with class concepts, this participation assignment requires each student to give one in-class presentation (3-4 min) on a topic from one of the assigned textbook chapters (worth 10 points). Students will work as partners and should approach this assignment by trying to become an “expert” on their chosen topic and prepare a show & tell style presentation with creative examples to illustrate the chapter concepts. Keeping in mind that the audience has a basic familiarity with the material, these presentations should try to relate the chapter concepts in a fun way and can present a number of “real world” examples that go beyond the explanation in the textbook.

**Before Your Chapter Chat:**
1) Sign-up for ONE of the Chapter Chats in class with a partner.
2) Choose one term/topic/issue to present to the class from one of the chapters designated for your Chapter Chat day.
3) E-mail your instructor 1 week before your presentation day to let them know which chapter you will present on and what you will be discussing in your chat.

**Structured Interview Reports:** You will conduct three structured interviews with other people about deception and then write up their responses and your observations in short reports. The overall idea of this assignment is for you to get exposure to the experiences and beliefs of other people in such a way that it helps you reflect on and sort through your own beliefs about deception. Instructions for conducting the interviews are provided on the attached sheets. You should follow the instructions on each interview sheet and record the answers given to you. Do not simply give the interview sheet to someone and tell them to fill it out. This does not constitute an interview. In most cases, you will want to add questions and probes that are not on the interview sheet in order to learn more about the interviewee’s beliefs, but only answers to the questions listed need to be recorded. Sometimes you will get an interviewee who does not provide you with much information. In some of those cases, you can use the person’s reticence as the basis for your analysis of the interview. In other cases, you might want to get another interviewee. In order to do an “A” interview, you are advised not to put it off until the last minute.

Your interview reports must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font in a single-spaced (NOT double-spaced) 8.5 X 11 inch document with 1 inch margins on all sides. Reports must contain each of the questions posed and the answers provided (accurate, detailed summaries if not verbatim responses). Each interview report is worth 30 points and must be submitted through D2L by 8:00 am on the day they are due (see class schedule for specific dates). NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. Reports can only be submitted through D2L, and will not be accepted if submitted in class or through e-mail. No penalty-free extensions will be granted for late papers under any circumstances, so please don’t waste your time or ours by asking. In addition to late penalties, reports will also be penalized if they:

- are not typed, spell-checked, or grammar-checked
- do not meet one or more specifications for the assignment
- contain conclusions drawn from the recorded answers to the interview questions that are not warranted
- contain interview responses that lack depth due to lack of probing
- have “learning” sections consisting of clichés or feeble attempts to please the instructor--for example, “I learned that lying is really important when two people communicate”
- have “learning” sections too imprecise, abstract, and/or lacking in depth of analysis

**Final Case Study Presentation:** In lieu of a final exam, you will be required to present an 8-10 minute presentation on a real life case study that reflects and expands on some of the concepts we will cover throughout the course. The presentation will be worth 30 points and must have an electronic visual aid. We will address several different case studies that examine different dimensions of lying and deception in the realm of interpersonal communication. Your presentation should cover a case study NOT covered in class and explain in depth analysis about the following criteria:

1) What is the context of your case study: Time, place, situation, people involved? What transpired to make this specific example unique or provocative? Was someone caught in a lie, deceived by someone, how so? No, we aren’t looking for conspiracy theories here, we’re attempting to look at verifiable events that happened in history. How was this event perceived through media reports or through academic research?
2) How this case relates to concepts and understandings from lecture or the textbook. How does it exemplify or explain, in a real world sense, many of the ideas and theories we have discussed throughout the semester?

3) How should we, as students of lying and deception, apply some of your conclusions or observations to similar or future contexts similar to your case study?

**Point Breakdown**

- Weekly Quizzes, 10 @ 2 points each: 20 points
- Attendance and Participation: 30 points
- Chapter Chat Presentation: 10 points
- Interviews, 3 @ 30 points each: 90 points
- Final Case Study Presentation: 30 points

**Total:** 180 points

**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

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