**FINAL EXAMINATION**

**Communication Studies 205: Theories of Persuasion**

**Spring 2021**

**Instructions**

Answer two of the following six questions. For each answer, the maximum page limit is four double-spaced pages.

Remember that the point of the assignment is to assess your grasp of relevant course material, and hence your central interest should be to display such grasp. Have a care for clarity and correctness in composition; spelling, grammar, and the like will play a role in evaluation. You should not discuss exam answers with others. *Be certain that the content, organization, and wording of your answers is yours alone.* You are welcome (but not expected or required) to refer to any reference materials you deem suitable, but be sure to provide appropriate bibliographic information for such materials.

Prepare your answers in the form of two separate Word documents (one for each question answered).

**Do not** put your name on your answers; use your 7-digit student ID number. Be sure that your student ID number appears on each document.

Exams are due by noon (12:00 p.m.) Central Time on Tuesday 8 June; late submissions will not be accepted.

Submit your answers through the course’s Canvas site by completing the two final exam assignments, which will involve attaching and submitting the relevant Word-document files. Put one of your answers in “final exam answer A” and the other one in “final exam answer B.” (It doesn’t matter which answer goes in which assignment.)

**Questions**

1. In your persuasive communication consulting firm, you’ve noticed a recurring situation that clients present: The audience doesn’t process the client’s messages carefully. The client has strong arguments to make for its advocated position (a position that is counterattitudinal for the audience) but, as matters currently stand, the audience just doesn’t thoughtfully engage with the arguments. The client’s target audience, topic, and position to be advocated are already settled and can’t be changed. Lay out a set of strategic options for persuaders in such situations. That is, identify and explain different possible approaches that a persuader might consider when facing such situations. (N.B.: Your answer should focus specifically on strategies for a persuader facing such a circumstance, rather than on general advice about improving effectiveness.) Your analysis is permitted to be conditional (“if this, do such-and-such; but if not, then do thus-and-so”).
2. In an effort to scare students, driver education programs in high schools sometimes employ unusually graphic films that include examples of particularly gruesome traffic accidents. Suppose it was discovered that such films were unproductive in changing attitudes or intentions (toward, say, defensive driving, or driving after drinking). What might explain this finding? And (correspondingly) how might one improve the effectiveness of the films?
3. Here is (an edited portion of) a Wikipedia entry concerning the foot-in-the-door (FITD) strategy, which offered two explanations for why the FITD strategy works. (#1) “The principle involved is that a small agreement creates a bond between the requester and the requestee,” that is, the effect occurs because first-request compliance makes the requestee like the requester, and this enhances second-request compliance. (#2) “The other person [the requestee] has to justify their agreement [with the first request] to him/herself. They have to convince themselves that it is because they like the requester or that they actually are interested in the item being requested. In a future request, they then feel obliged to act consistently with their internal explanation they have built.” How is explanation #1 defective? How is explanation #2 defective? (Note: These two explanations are different from the one discussed in class, but that does not make them defective, and it is not a reason to believe these explanations are wrong. That is, what’s wrong with these explanations is not that they’re not the one discussed in class. These are competitors to that explanation, so naturally they’re different from that explanation. The question is: How are these explanations defective?)
4. Pick one of the following communicator characteristics: age, ethnic background, race. Discuss how variations in this communicator characteristic might influence persuasive outcomes. Be specific about the effects you identify (for instance, be clear about relevant limiting conditions). For each different sort of effect you identify (or each different sort of situation or condition), give at least one concrete example; that is, describe a circumstance in which one might plausibly find the sort of effect you are describing.
5. There is good research evidence concerning the direction of credibility’s influence (on persuasive outcomes) with low-involvement topics, specifically: when the source advocates a counterattitudinal view (that is, one opposed to the receiver’s own viewpoint), higher credibility sources are more effective than lower credibility sources; but when the source advocates a proattitudinal view (that is, one toward which the receiver initially feels at least somewhat favorable), lower credibility sources are more effective than higher credibility sources. Here is a proposed explanation for these findings (an explanation based on dissonance theory):

When one hears a high credibility source advocate a counterattitudinal position (i.e., opposed to one’s own view), this creates dissonance (or at least more dissonance than is created hearing a low credibility source advocate a counterattitudinal position), and to resolve this dissonance one’s attitude changes in the advocated direction. When one hears a low credibility source present a proattitudinal message, this creates dissonance (more than is created hearing a high credibility source advocate a proattitudinal position), and again to resolve this dissonance, one’s attitude changes in the advocated direction. Hence, for low-involvement topics, high credi­bility sources are more effective (than low) with counterattitudinal positions, but low credibility sources are more effective (than high) with proattitudinal positions.

What’s wrong with this explanation? (One thing to think about, to help you get started: what would this analysis predict would be the effects of credibility differences on high-involvement topics?)

1. We discussed a number of variables that have been thought to influence persuasive effectiveness (credibility, involvement, etc.). What important variable(s) do you think went unmentioned? Why is that variable important? What are its likely relations to the variables we discussed? What effects do you think it will have on persuasive effectiveness? (Note: It is not permitted to nominate age/race/ethnicity as such a variable; see question #4.)