

Communication Studies 205-0  
Theories of Persuasion  
Spring 2020

**COURSE INFORMATION**

**Professor:** Daniel O’Keefe  
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**Course site:** [www.dokeefe.net/205S20.html](http://www.dokeefe.net/205S20.html) or via [www.soc.northwestern.edu/dokeefe](http://www.soc.northwestern.edu/dokeefe)

**Text** (supplementary): D. O’Keefe, *Persuasion: Theory and research* (3rd ed., paperback, Sage) (ISBN 978-1-4522-7667-0) (available at the Library Reserve Room—for all that that’s going to be helpful)

**Brief course description and tentative outline:** This course provides a general introduction to the social-scientific study of persuasive communication. The course focuses on alternative theoretical accounts of the processes underlying persuasion and on research findings concerning the effects of various factors on persuasive effectiveness.

- I. Introduction
- II. Theoretical approaches
  - A. Social judgment theory
  - B. Belief-based models
  - C. Functional approaches
  - D. Reasoned action theory
  - E. Elaboration likelihood model
  - F. Balance theory
- III. Factors influencing persuasive effectiveness
  - A. Source factors
  - B. Message factors
  - C. Receiver factors

**Course format:** This course has a lecture-and-discussion-section format, with two lectures and one discussion-section meeting each week. Quizzes and exams are based on material presented in lecture. Lectures are recorded and uploaded in Zoom; the day-by-day schedule page at the course website will provide links to lectures ([www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html](http://www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html)).

Discussion sections provide an opportunity to ask questions about, or otherwise engage with, material in the preceding lectures. Discussion-section meetings will take the form of synchronous Zoom meetings in the regularly scheduled time period (12:00pm-2:00pm Central); your TA will send you information each week about how to log in.

There is no required reading. The text is a supplement to, not a replacement for, the lectures. Quiz/exam questions assume you have not even looked at the supplemental reading. In case you do want to read the supplementary text, the latter part of this document indicates what parts of the text correspond to the material being covered each week in class.

After each lecture, a study guide will be posted online at the course website. The study-guide questions are not exam/quiz questions; they are the kinds of questions a tutor might ask in a one-on-one encounter in order to lead you through the material.

The primary purpose of the study guides is to get you ready for the multiple-choice quizzes (about which more detail appears below). There's nothing in the multiple-choice questions that isn't on the study guides. If you have mastered the study guide, there will be no surprises in the multiple-choice questions.

Recommendations: (1) Before each week's discussion-section meeting, do the study guides for the preceding lectures that week. That way, if you have questions, you can ask them in discussion section. (2) When a multiple-choice quiz is imminent, be sure to have already worked through the relevant study guides.

**Remote access support:** Northwestern is committed to ensuring students remain connected to courses and learning resources while participating remotely. Much useful information can be found [here](#).

**Resources students can access remotely:** University resources such as academic advising, career services, Counseling and Psychological Services, and the Health Service, will be available remotely. More information is [here](#).

**Course grading:** As you will know, for the Spring 2020 quarter, Northwestern undergraduate course grades will be submitted as Pass/No Pass (P/N) grades.

In this course, course grades will be based on two kinds of graded elements. One will take the form of *multiple-choice questions* aimed at assessing mastery of detailed information and on-the-spot reasoning with those details. The second will take the form of a *take-home essay final* that asks for integration of course materials (e.g., in the form of application to specific persuasion problems) and coherent presentation of such integrated treatments.

**About the multiple-choice questions:** From time to time, a brief online multiple-choice quiz will be given covering the preceding segment of course material. A total of five such online quizzes will be given.

For each quiz, a score distribution will be created and a simple Pass/No Pass curve drawn (akin to familiar letter-grade curves). The curve will specify the minimum number of correct answers required to earn a Pass for that quiz.

Quizzes will be given in Canvas. Each quiz will have a time limit (appropriate to the number of questions on that quiz) and will be available for 24 hours. Quiz dates are given in the day-by-day schedule at the course site ([www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html](http://www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html)). (Tentative quiz dates also appear in the tentative schedule at the end of this document.)

**About the take-home essay final:** The take-home essay final exam questions will be available online not later than 11:00 a.m. Central Time on Monday 1 June. Answers will be submitted digitally via Canvas, and will be due not later than noon Central Time Monday 8 June.

In the take-home essay final, you will choose two questions to answer from a set of six. For each answer the maximum page length will be four double-spaced pages. Each question will be graded Pass/No Pass. To earn a Pass for the final exam as a whole, each individual question must receive a Pass.

**Computing course grades:** To earn a Pass for the course grade, one must (a) earn a Pass on at least four of the five quizzes and (b) earn a Pass for the final exam.

However, before course grades are submitted, the raw scores on the quizzes are reviewed. If the circumstance is such that having answered correctly just one additional question on just one quiz would have changed one's course grade from No Pass to Pass, then a course grade of Pass is given. [Put differently: If (a) one has received two, but only two, No Pass quiz grades but (b) one has received a Pass on the final exam, and (c) the difference between one's passing and not passing one of those two quizzes was a single question, then a course grade of Pass is given.]

**Academic dishonesty:** Don't do it. (If uncertain about what constitutes a violation of Northwestern University's standards of academic integrity, consult the University web site: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/>.)

Bad things will happen if you do. (These can include a failing grade on the assignment—and worse. Again, see the University web site. For details on School of Communication procedures:

<http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/files/ProceduresAllegedAcademicDishonesty.pdf> .)

**Sexual harassment:** Don't do it, and don't accept it being done. (For more information: [www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment](http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment).)

**Recording or downloading class sessions:** Don't do it.

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should make contact with [AccessibleNU](http://www.accessiblenu.edu). Unauthorized use of classroom recordings—including distributing or posting them—is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials—including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

**Accommodations for disabilities:** Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU ([accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class (i.e., not later than Friday 17 April). All information will remain confidential. For details: <http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/>

**Some tentative dates of interest:**

Monday 20 April by 9:00 a.m. CT: online quiz #1 posted

Monday 27 April by 9:00 a.m. CT: online quiz #2 posted

Monday 11 May by 9:00 a.m. CT: online quiz #3 posted

Monday 18 May by 9:00 a.m. CT: online quiz #4 posted

Thursday 28 May by 9:00 a.m. CT: online quiz #5 posted

Take-home final available online: Monday 1 June not later than 11:00 a.m. CT

Take-home final due: Monday 8 June not later than noon (12:00 p.m.) CT

**Tentative schedule:** For an updated day-by-day schedule with links to (inter alia) online lectures: [www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html](http://www.dokeefe.net/205daybydayS20.html)

Week of 6 April

W 4/8: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 4/10: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: concept of persuasion, attitude measurement, assessing persuasion  
supplementary reading: pp. 1-18

Week of 13 April

M 4/13: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 4/15: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 4/17: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: social judgment theory  
supplementary reading: pp. 19-34

Week of 20 April

**M 4/20: online quiz #1** posted not later than 9am CT  
available for 24 hours (i.e., until 9am CT Tu 4/21)  
covers material from 4/8 through 4/15 (intro, social judgment)  
M 4/20: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 4/22: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 4/24: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: belief-based models, functional approaches  
supplementary reading: pp. 56-75 (belief-based); pp. 35-55 (functional)

Week of 27 April

**M 4/27: online quiz #2** posted not later than 9am CT  
available for 24 hours (i.e., until 9am CT Tu 4/28)  
covers material from 4/20 through 4/22 (belief-based, functional)  
M 4/27: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 4/29: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 5/1: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: reasoned action theory (RAT)  
supplementary reading: pp. 98-13

Week of 4 May

M 5/4: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 5/6: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 5/8: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: elaboration likelihood model (ELM), balance theory  
supplementary reading: pp. 148-175 (ELM)

Week of 11 May

**M 5/11: online quiz #3** posted not later than 9am CT  
available for 24 hours (i.e., until 9am CT Tu 5/12)  
covers material from 4/27 through 5/6 (RAT, ELM, balance)  
M 5/11: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 5/13: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 5/15: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: source factors, message factors part 1  
supplementary reading: pp. 188-213 (source), pp. 214-251 (message)

Week of 18 May

**M 5/18: online quiz #4** posted not later than 9am CT  
available for 24 hours (i.e., until 9am CT Tu 5/19)  
covers material from 5/11 through 5/13 (source, message pt. 1)  
M 5/18: lecture available online by 11am CT  
W 5/20: lecture available online by 11am CT  
F 5/22: online discussion sections 12pm-2pm CT  
topic: message factors part 2, receiver part 1  
supplementary reading: pp. 214-251

Week of 25 May

M 5/25: no class business (Memorial Day)  
W 5/27: lecture available online by 11am CT  
topic: receiver factors part 2  
supplementary reading: pp. 252-267  
**Th 5/28: online quiz #5** posted not later than 9am CT  
available for 24 hours (i.e., until 9am CT F 5/29)  
covers material from 5/18 through 5/27 (message pt. 2, receiver pts. 1 & 2)  
F 5/29: no discussion-section meetings

Week of 1 June

**M 6/1: take-home final essay exam available** online by 11am CT  
W 6/3: no class business  
F 6/5: no class business

Week of 8 June (exam week)

**M 6/8: final exam due** by 12pm (noon) CT.