

“If you’re avoiding conflict in order to stop fighting in your relationship, you definitely want to change that, because avoiding conflict is definitely not the path to a healthy relationship.”

– Paul McNiff, Relationship Counselor

“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it.”

– Dorothy Thomas, Human Rights author

“If this is what he wants, and this is what she wants, then why is there so much pain?”

– Blink 182



Instructor: Dr. Brian Richardson
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Office Hours:
Tu and Th 9:15-10:45 a.m.
 and by appointment

* **Course communication:** We will use Canvas to communicate course-related messages. I also check my email regularly if you have question about non-course related items.

Your instructor’s bio: I am originally from Bridge City, Texas. My degrees are from Lamar University (B.S.), Louisiana Tech University (M.A.), and the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D.). My research interests include organizational whistleblowing, disaster-related communication, and sport communication issues. You can find my research in journals such as *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, the *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, *Western Journal of Communication*, and others. I do some consulting, having worked with the Texas Fire Chiefs Academy, the UNT Health Science Center, the UNT System, and the Veterans Affairs - Houston office. As a first-generation college student, I did not know many of the things other students took for granted, like “office hours” or “APA style” or “internships.” Further, I did not know about all of the department and university resources available to assist and support me. I encourage you to ask me about any concerns or issues you are facing; I am happy to put you in touch with resources and departments on campus that can assist you. I am sure you have many of the same questions I had back when I was in college, so feel free to ask me anything.

Prerequisites: Communication Studies majors must complete COMM 3010 with a grade of C or better prior to enrolling or be concurrently enrolled in COMM 3010; minors/other majors must complete COMM 2020.

Course Rationale: From the small, interpersonal conflicts that impact our daily lives to the protests and political divisions dominating media coverage, conflict affects everyone on a routine basis. Conflict occurs within all levels of society: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, intercultural, and international. If managed well, conflict can lead to innovation, positive change, and enhanced relationships. However, conflict managed poorly can lead to frustration, hurt feelings, stagnancy,

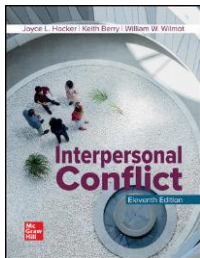
damaged relationships, and even violence. The purpose of this course is to learn more about the nature of conflict, particularly interpersonal conflict, and to enhance our understanding of how to effectively manage conflict. The role of *communication* in this endeavor is emphasized.

Course Objectives:

1. To enhance your understanding of what constitutes conflict, particularly from a communication perspective.
2. To enhance your understanding of how you and key others perceive your conflict style.
3. To be able to distinguish paths and patterns of destructive and constructive conflict.
4. To enhance understanding of significant factors which affect conflict management including power, emotion, styles, third-parties, and forgiveness.
5. To develop skills for understanding, analyzing, and reviewing an actual interpersonal conflict or professional that manages substantive conflict.

Textbook and Readings:

Hocker, J., Berry, K., & Wilmot, W. (2022). *Interpersonal Conflict (11 Ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

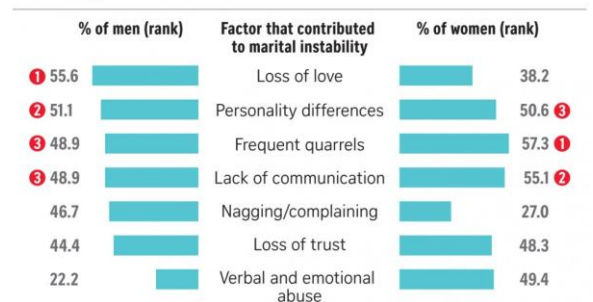


Additional readings will be provided on Canvas or distributed in class. These are not “optional readings.” They are relevant to lecture material, the course assignments, and to the exams. **You are responsible for ensuring that you read all assigned readings.**

Does conflict management matter? You bet; we will talk about many types of relationships this semester, one of which is marriage. See the graphic to the left for common causes of marital instability, several of which are related to poor conflict management.

Common factors for marital instability

Respondents were asked to select, from a list of 18 options, the factors that contributed to their marriages breaking down.



NOTE: Numbers in circles denote top three factors
Source: SURVEY BY DR JESSICA LEONG ST GRAPHICS

ASSIGNMENTS

- I. **Homework/Pop Quiz Assignments:** On ten occasions this semester, you will have an opportunity to earn 15 points (150 points total) for successfully completing a pop quiz or a homework assignment. If you have thoroughly read and follow the instructions, you should excel. There will be NO make-up opportunities for these assignments. I will actually give you 11 assignments, allowing you to drop your lowest grade.

II. Personal Reflection Assignment

Assignment's Objective: To enable students to examine their personal growth as conflict managers.

Contents:

1) Five (5) journal entries about your experiences with conflict during the semester. A journal entry would include date, description of conflict situation, who is involved and how you approached the conflict situation. The entry only needs be a few sentences to a couple of paragraphs; but may be longer if you need it to be. (10 points)

2) Reflections on 3 in-class activities. Identify whether you were an observer, participant, or both. What did you learn from the activity about the academic theory/concept underlying the activity? What did you learn about your own skills? In particular, pay attention to other students' comments during the debriefing discussion. You might write about your reactions to those comments. For example, what surprised you in their remarks? What comforted you? Etc. You should do the reflections after each class activity and then select the 3 most valuable ones for inclusion in the working file. (15 points)

3) Summary paper (2.5-3.5 pages). After completing the journal entries and in-class reflections, write a summary paper of what you learned during the semester about the nature of conflict, how you manage it, and what you will need to work on in the future. Include relevant concepts from textbooks/course readings. Include citations as appropriate. (25 points)

Grading: The complete file is worth 50 points. Grades will be based upon following instructions, correct application of concepts, thoroughness of explanations, clarity of ideas, and writing acumen.

DUE DATE: See course schedule.

- III. **Exams:** There will be three online exams given during the term. Each exam is worth 75 points toward your course grade. Exams may consist of any combination of matching, multiple-choice, true-and-false, fill-in-the-blank, or short-answer questions. The purpose of these exams is to ascertain that you understand the concepts presented. If you are keeping up with the readings and participating actively in the class, it should not be difficult to do well on these exams. See Course Schedule for Exam dates. You will have a 24-hour window for accessing the exam. You will have about 90 seconds for each question. Once you submit an answer for a question, you cannot go back and change it. You can use your notes, textbook, etc., when taking the exam.

Note 1: There are no makeup exams. If you miss an exam, you lose the points associated with it. The only exceptions are due to documented sickness, death in the family, or some other catastrophe. I am very unlikely to allow you to take an exam after the scheduled time if you do not contact me *prior to* the exam.

Note 2: I will only count your top two exam scores toward your grade.

IV. Term Paper Assignment

Option A: Individuals or Organizations Dedicated to Conflict Management/Dispute Resolution

Objective: * To learn how professional conflict managers use communication.

Process:

1. Conduct research to identify various organizations or individuals whose main purpose is conflict management/dispute resolution. Select one that matches your interest.
2. It is expected that a minimum of six academic articles published within the past 10 years references will be used as the foundation for your project. You may use your textbook but it does NOT count towards meeting the research requirement for the assignment. You should explore the conflict management literature within the communication discipline before using sources from other disciplines. The fastest/easiest way to find communication journals is to use the library's database called "Communication & Mass Media Complete."
3. Conduct an interview with the individual/organization to compare how they approach conflict management with what is in the academic literature.
4. Focus your analysis on "How this person/organization uses communication skills/processes/technologies etc., to perform conflict management/dispute resolution activities?" "How does this compare with material presented in the textbooks, lectures, and other academic sources?"
5. Your final paper should be 6-7 pages in length (12 pt. font, 1 inch margins, double-spaced) and be spell-checked, proof-read, and grammatically correct. A reference page should be attached, and your paper MUST include at least six scholarly references. The paper must be written in APA format and can be turned in via *Turnitin* on Canvas.

Option B: Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Assessment

Objective: To conduct research about a specific aspect of communication and conflict management in an actual interpersonal conflict.

1. Find people in a real-life conflict who would like your advice, or who will at least talk to you about a conflict they are in. Alternatively, you can select a conflict you are/were involved in. Interview the parties involved, asking them their perspective on the conflict. Briefly describe the conflict, analyze the conflict using course material (**e.g. use the conflict definition to show why this is a conflict, use some of the theories from the textbook or outside sources to analyze the**

conflict, etc.) and make concrete suggestions as to how the conflict can best be managed, based on information from the textbook and additional academic sources. If you are one of the conflict parties, make suggestions for your own conflict behavior.

2. It is expected that a minimum of six academic articles published within the past 10 years references will be used as the foundation for your project. You may use your textbook but it does NOT count towards meeting the research requirement for the assignment. You should explore the conflict management literature within the communication discipline before using sources from other disciplines. The fastest/easiest way to find communication journals is to use the library's database called "Communication & Mass Media Complete."
3. Describe and assess as much of the conflict as needed to make your suggestions understandable. Focus on explaining what you see as the principle problem(s) and then explaining exactly how your suggestions address those problems. Be concise and precise in your writing. Be realistic in your recommendations. Use the conclusion to restate the principal problems and the reasoning for your suggested management techniques.
4. This paper will likely have three major parts: an intro describing the conflict; an analysis section which examines the conflict with the help of academic reference material; a recommendation section in which you offer potential solutions, with the help of academic reference material, to manage the conflict effectively.
5. The paper should be 6-7 pages in length (12 pt. font, 1 inch margins) and be spell-checked, proof-read, and grammatically correct. A reference page should be attached, and your paper MUST include at least six scholarly references (journal articles from library or scholarly book chapters) published within the last 10 years. Your textbook can be used but does not count as one of the six scholarly references. The paper must be written in APA format and turned in on Canvas.

The more insightful your writing and analysis, the more you will be rewarded with points. That is, surface observations (e.g., "she thought he was being rude but he was just having a bad day") will not be rewarded as much as will more in depth and subtle observations (e.g., "her reaction can best be explain by attribution theory, particularly the self-serving bias. According to Smith (2008), self-serving bias occurs when ... ").

Grading Criteria: Criteria for Written Activities will be followed in assessing this assignment (See Appendix).

Total points breakdown

Two exams (2x75)	150 pts.
Term Paper	150 pts.
Personal reflection assignment	50 pts.
Homework/Discussion assignments (10x15)	<u>150 pts.</u>
Total	500 pts.

Grade determination: The points in this class are based on the assignments discussed above. Your final grade is based entirely on the sum of those points assigned in the class, and I will adhere rigidly to those points. The points correspond to the following university guidelines: an A is

reserved for excellent work; a B is for above average performance; a C is awarded for average work; a D simply means passing, and an F indicates below average, nonpassing work. Points-wise the grades will be categorized as follows: 450-500 = A; 400-449.5 = B; 350-399.5 = C; 300-349.5 = D; 0- 299.5 = F

Extra Credit: During the semester, you will have opportunities to earn extra credit (XC) for (a) participating in research projects by department faculty or graduate students, or (b) attending events/meetings related to COMM department organizations/events. Details for those opportunities will be announced as they arise and participation is strictly voluntary. Students who choose to not participate will not be penalized. Please note that extra credit opportunities are offered to all students in the course – I will not customize the number of extra credit opportunities to individual students. XC opportunities will be worth 5-10 points each and will be added to your final point total. The maximum number of XC points any students can receive is 20.



We will watch some video case studies this semester to learn about conflict management. I'm sure we can do a better job than *The Office's* Michael Scott!

Course Approach:

It is my objective to make this course enjoyable, and to get you familiarized with conflict management, from theoretical and applied perspectives. I pledge to provide quick and efficient communication as well as meaningful and timely feedback on work that you complete. For example, I will read all of your assignments and offer constructive feedback on your writing. At the same time, it is your responsibility to raise issues when they occur-not at the end of the course. I want you to have a positive learning experience but ultimately the course will give you back what you choose to put into it in terms of time and effort.

Also, please keep in mind that due to the nature of the conflicts that will be covered and analyzed in the course **you may feel a personal connection to some of them**; please feel free to speak with me if you have any concerns regarding the examples or case studies in use.

Technical difficulties with Canvas: If you encounter technical difficulties during the semester, you need to contact the Canvas Technical Support Desk:

UIT Help Desk: [UIT Student Help Desk site \(http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm\)](http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm)

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130

Walk-In Availability: 8am-9pm

Telephone Availability:

- Sunday: noon-midnight
 - Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
Saturday: 9am-5pm

Laptop Checkout: 8am-7pm

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help \(https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328\)](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)

Course policies

ODA Policy: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>

Attendance: Attendance is taken at the beginning of class using a seating chart. A student is expected to arrive on time and be present for the entire class period. To allow for illness or other unforeseen situations, students in the course are allotted 3 absences. Excused and unexcused absences count the same, with the one exception being university-related absences, e.g. debate team, college athletics, etc. Each absence beyond the limit will result in **your final course grade being lowered by 10 points per absence** (e.g. from 435 to 425 for one excessive absence). Excessive absences caused by **serious** health problems will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. You will be counted absent if you do not sign the attendance sheet. If you sign the attendance sheet and then leave, you will be counted as absent. Cases where someone signs in for another student will be treated as academic misconduct cases.

Late work. There are no makeup opportunities for pop quizzes. Except under the most extreme circumstances (and documentation of those circumstances is required), no late homework assignments will be accepted. If you encounter an emergency situation, it is best to communicate with me about it earlier rather than later. It is not fair to others who met the deadlines if I accept yours late. Also, no longer are technology problems reasonable excuses for late papers. **I suggest knowing technology well enough and allowing ample time in case of problems.** Before attempting any written assignment, please see the course packet for instructions and grading criteria. All assignments must be turned in by the due date or they will be considered late. **For the personal reflection assignment and term paper only, late papers** will be graded for half credit. This is a severe penalty, but is better than zero points (plus, you get feedback on the assignment). It is not fair to others who met the deadlines if I accept your assignments late. I will not accept either of these assignments more than one week late.

Academic Dishonesty. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and using AI programs like ChatGPT to write papers or do assignments. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Of particular concern in a course with written and oral assignments is the issue of plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined by Webster's (1989) as "the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (p. 1100). In other words, plagiarism is stealing. You must cite your sources accurately and consistently in both your oral and written assignments. Penalties for plagiarism will vary according to severity and will range from a failing grade to prosecution through the University System. Please note: Your term paper will be uploaded to turnitin.com.

Acceptable Student Behavior: This course is designed to foster and maintain a positive learning environment. Your active participation during discussions will be encouraged and questions or

comments at any time during lectures are welcomed. Importantly, all comments and responses should be friendly and respectful of the other students in the class. Diversity of perspectives is critical to a liberal arts education so you are free to share viewpoints which may differ from others in the class. Again, please do so in a respectful way and support your responses with evidence and data. Finally, class will begin promptly at the scheduled time. If extraordinary circumstances exist that require some deviation from these policies (e.g., family emergency), please email/message me. I know many of our students work, are parents, or are caregivers to others so I am happy to work with you on scheduling issues. Please feel free to share any further suggestions for maintaining a positive learning environment that you may have.

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr

Writing quality assumptions. Every assignment you turn in must be of quality, both in content and style. I will not accept papers with significant grammatical and typographical errors. I expect you to take advantage of the programs that guard against such errors; however, there is no substitute for good proofreading. Papers, particularly on the essay assignments must conform to APA standards. I will provide models of exemplary papers from past classes as resources.

Completing the Course. Students are expected to complete all assignments for this course during the semester. Assigning a grade of "incomplete" is rare, and in order to request an "I," the student must meet these requirements: a) The student must have completed at least 75% of the course assignments; b) The student must be passing the course; c) There must be an unforeseen and compelling reason why the course cannot be completed on time (usually a medical or military reason); and d) The student must present a plan for completing the assignments within the time period specified in the catalog.

Crisis Contingency. In the event of the university closing for weather-related reasons or illness outbreak, e.g. COVID, please refer to Canvas for instructions about how we will proceed.

Using technology in class. Laptops, tablets, and other technology should only be used to take notes during class. You should try to avoid using technology for non-instructional purposes during class (e.g., checking your social media or email, surfing the internet, gaming, etc.). This includes your cell phone, which should be kept on silent at all times. Inappropriate use of technology during class hinders your learning and also distracts those around you. As a result, most students would agree that this policy is in place for your own benefit and that you should try your best to follow it. Failure to comply with this policy will result in a deduction from your final course grade for each offense. So, you should try to follow these rules at all times.

The Communication Studies Library is a valuable resource for students taking COMM courses. The library is located in GAB 318 and is staffed by COMM majors who can assist students with their projects and papers. The library has a large, searchable collection of scholarly books, e.g. *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication*, and textbooks, e.g. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, which

are especially helpful for writing assignments. You can work in the library and/or the library staff can copy chapters from books so that you can work on them at home.

Its **hours** are Monday-Thursday (10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.). To make a reservation or request a scanned copy, email untcommlibrary@gmail.com. Our current catalog of books and handbooks is located on the communications Studies Website: <https://communication.unt.edu/research/library>

First week drops: The instructor reserves the right to drop students who do not participate in first week activities if other students are attempting to add the course.



One thing we will emphasize this semester is the role of communication in constructively or destructively managing conflict.

Tentative Course Schedule & Key Dates

We will generally follow the order of the book, and I will keep you abreast of what to read prior to each week through Canvas postings.

- Course and individual introductions
- Can conflict be constructive? (no reading)
- The Nature of Conflict (*Hocker & Wilmot*, Ch. 1)
- Perspectives on Conflict (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 2)
- Interests and Goals (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 3)
- Power: The Structure of Conflict (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 4)
- Conflict Styles (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 5)
- Emotions in Conflict (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 6)
- Analyzing Conflict (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 7)
- Interpersonal Negotiation (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 9)
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation/Third-party intervention (*Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 10)
- Bullying (Read *Wilmot & Hocker*, Ch. 8)

Key Dates:

- Exam I (**9/28 1:00 p.m. – 9/30 1:00 p.m.**)
- Exam II (**11/2 1:00 p.m. – 11/4 1:00 p.m.**)
- Term papers due via Turnitin on Canvas (**Nov. 17, 11:59 p.m.**)
- Personal Reflection assignment due on Canvas (**Nov. 30, 11:59 p.m.**)
- *Exam III (**12/12 8:00 a.m. - 12/13 11:59 p.m.**)

* *noncumulative*

Acknowledgements: Colleen Keough, University of Southern California