

COMM 3220.001: Spring 2026

Health Communication

TR 2pm – 3:20pm, WH 321

Professor: Dr. Joseph McGlynn

Email: Joseph.McGlynn@unt.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 2pm – 5pm, and by appointment

Office Hours Location: GAB 320-C

Required texts:

du Pré, A., & Overton, B. C. (2021, 2023). *Communicating about health: Current issues and perspectives* (6th or 7th edition). Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0197664308

Optional texts:

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson*. New York: Doubleday. ISBN: 978-0767905923

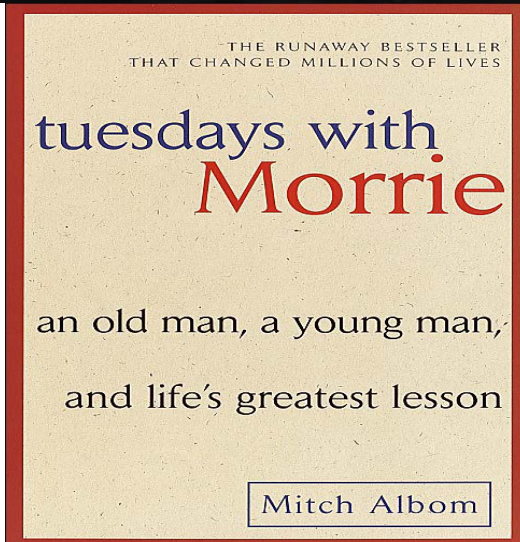
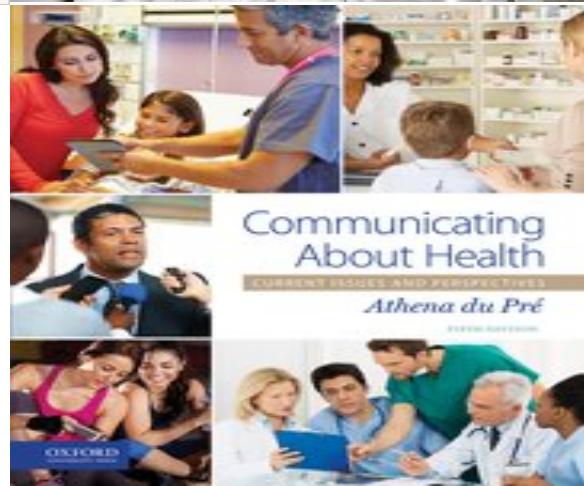
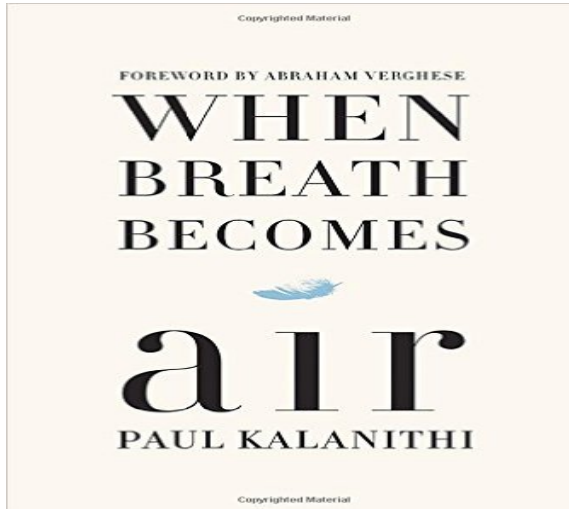
Kalanithi, P. (2016). *When breath becomes air*. New York: Random House. ISBN: 978-0812988406

Course Description

Communication in medical settings; origins, nature and impact of communication practices and beliefs in the health-care delivery system; role of interaction on human well-being.

Learning Objectives

- Theoretical perspectives of health communication
- Social influences on health
- Cognitive influences on health
- The intersection of technology and health
- Elements of effective health campaigns
- Risk and uncertainty in health contexts
- Health communication and persuasion



Attendance and Participation

Learning is a social process. In order for this class to be successful, your attendance and participation are imperative. We will conduct this class as a seminar, performing the roles of teachers and learners simultaneously. This is possible only if everyone prepares in advance for class by giving thoughtful attention to the assigned readings, assuming a constructive role in class discussions, asking questions, thoughtfully attending to the ideas of others, and sharing your own insights.

If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to learn about assignments or any class work missed, ideally from other members of the class. If that is impossible for some reason, you are certainly free to *then* contact your instructor.

Due to the time constraints of this course, you are allowed 3 unexcused absences this semester. With each additional absence, 5 points will be deducted off your final grade per absence. Any student absence from class is considered *unexcused* with the exception of personal or family illness requiring physician assistance/hospitalization, UNT school-sponsored activity, religious holy day, or death of a family member. Documentation must be provided within 1 calendar week after the return to class. A verbal explanation is appreciated but will not suffice as sufficient documentation for consideration.

Attendance Policy (UNT)

Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent, so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. Please inform the professor and instructional team if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community.

Assignment Policies

You are responsible for turning work in on time. **Late work will not be accepted** without a *documented* “authorized absence” as defined by UNT. You cannot make up missed daily activities under any circumstances. If you are unable to attend class on the day an assignment is due, or if there is any remote chance your car might break down, you might get stuck in traffic, etc., you must email that assignment to me no later than the due date to avoid penalties for lateness.

All assignments must be typed. Should you miss class due to an excused absence, you must complete the missed assignment and turn it in no later than the beginning of the next class period. You may also turn these in early.

Please note: If any assignment is missed due to any reason other than documented death, extreme illness, religious observance, UNT activity (see absence policy above), you will be unable to make up the work. You must plan ahead for all assignments, both major and daily, as each constitute a significant part of your final grade and cannot easily be redone or resubmitted due to timing and spatial issues.

Grading of Assignments

All presentations and assignments are based upon a point system. Students will receive a thorough description of requirements for all assignments before they are due, as well as a detailed explanation of all assignments and grading procedures. Your work will be assessed in terms of concept comprehension and skill mastery. In regard to the skill mastery assessments, it must be stressed that although objective standards exist that can be used to determine the quality of an oral communication skill, a certain amount of subjectivity is inherent in the determination of the degree to which such standards are met. It is your responsibility as the student to keep up with points accrued throughout the semester.

After a graded assignment has been returned to you, you must wait a minimum of 24 hours before contacting your instructor about a possible grade dispute. After a graded assignment has been returned to you, you have a maximum of 1 week to contact your instructor regarding a possible grade dispute.

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. 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 sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Academic Integrity Standards and Standards for Violations

According to UNT Policy 18.1.16, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Cheating. The willful giving or receiving of information in an unauthorized manner during an examination, illicitly obtaining examination questions in advance, using someone else's work or written assignments as if they were your own, or any other dishonest means of attempting to fulfill a requirement of this course.

Plagiarism. The use of an author's words or ideas as if they were your own without giving proper credit to the source, including but not limited to failure to acknowledge a direct quotation. Exact wording from a source must be identified by quotation marks and citation of the author. Concepts and ideas from sources should also be identified by citation of the author. Rules for citing quotes and ideas can be found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th edition. *Intentionality is not a factor in determining plagiarism and its consequential penalties.* Students are responsible for making themselves aware of the parameters and provisions of plagiarism.

Plagiarism includes the use of A.I. software or apps (e.g., ChatGPT) to write, edit, or paraphrase text for your paper, as you did not author these words or ideas. The professor of this course will use automated methods to search student papers for A.I.-generated text. Students will be assumed to be the author of all submitted text and assignments. As such, students may be asked to explain portions of their papers or to defend arguments presented in their papers verbally. This verbal explanation can then factor into a student's paper grade, influencing the final grade for that paper up to and including the assignment of a 0% or grade of F for the assignment. The penalty for the first use of A.I.-generated text will be a zero for the assignment. The penalty for the second use of A.I.-generated text will be a grade of "F" for the course.

Ethical use of A.I. for academic papers. For this class, clearly state when you have used A.I. and describe how you employed it. What prompts did you use? What were the results of your query? If you do want to use A.I. for ethical purposes, such as the creation of ideas for a potential paper topic, you must declare that you used the A.I. tool and also provide a copy of the results generated by A.I. Keep a record of all original work, prompts entered, and text generated by A.I. for each assignment. **Remember that for this class, the expectation is that all actual writing will be done by you without the assistance of A.I.** Use of A.I. to create written portions of any assignment is strictly prohibited and considered plagiarism.

Collusion. Intentionally aiding or attempting to aid another in an act of scholastic dishonesty, including but not limited to, providing a paper or project to another student; providing an inappropriate level of assistance; communicating answers to a classmate during an examination; removing tests or answer sheets from a test site, and allowing a classmate to copy answers.

Punishments for cheating, plagiarism, or collusion range from a grade of ZERO on the assignment in question to failure of the course.

Policy on Incompletes

An “Incomplete” will be awarded only in cases where 75% of the coursework has been completed and the grade is warranted by an exigent reason (e.g., medical, military). Inability to complete coursework in a timely fashion does not constitute an acceptable reason for requesting or receiving an incomplete.

Acceptable Student Behavior

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 Dean of Students 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. Visit UNT’s [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Survivor Advocacy

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Access to Information – Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Academic Support & Student Services

Mental Health

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center>)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>)
- [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care>)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry>)
- [Individual Counseling](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling>)

Additional Student Support Services

- [Registrar](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration) (<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration>)
- [Financial Aid](https://financialaid.unt.edu/) (<https://financialaid.unt.edu/>)
- [Student Legal Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services>)
- [Career Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center>)
- [Multicultural Center](https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center) (<https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center>)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>)

- [Pride Alliance](https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance) (https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance)
- [UNT Food Pantry](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

Academic Support Services

- [Academic Resource Center](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources) (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
- [Academic Success Center](https://success.unt.edu/asc) (https://success.unt.edu/asc)
- [UNT Libraries](https://library.unt.edu/) (https://library.unt.edu/)
- [Writing Lab](http://writingcenter.unt.edu/) (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

ADA Statement

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 at disability.unt.edu

Student Evaluation Administration Dates

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website](http://spot.unt.edu) (<http://spot.unt.edu>) or email spot@unt.edu.

Distractions

Turn off all cell phones and place them out of sight during class.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is an agreement between the instructional faculty member teaching a course and the students enrolled in that course. The syllabus establishes the instructional faculty member's expectations, providing students with an overview of course content and explanations of course guidelines, procedures, and requirements. Consistent with UNT Policy 15.2.20, Academic Freedom and Academic Responsibility, instructional faculty have the academic freedom to design the course and present the syllabus as they wish, and instructional faculty have the academic responsibility to

include specific items to fulfill state and institutional requirements. This syllabus is intended to serve as a guideline for COMM 3220: Health Communication. Both UNT and your professor reserve the right to make modifications in content, schedule, and requirements as necessary to promote the optimal educational experiences within prevailing conditions affecting the course.

Assignments

Quizzes & In-class Activities (25 points total)

Reading is a key component to maximizing learning. Unannounced quizzes over the reading assignments will provide opportunities to demonstrate your dedication to the reading and your understanding of the course material. Reading quizzes will cover the assigned reading material for that calendar day only, unless otherwise stated. In addition to reading quizzes, we will also have in-class activities. These activities are unannounced opportunities to participate in the learning process during class periods. They will be extemporaneous in nature and completed during class.

Please note: Due to their spontaneous nature, in-class activities and quizzes that are missed cannot be made up. Similarly, if you are late to class and the activity or quiz is completed before you arrive, the same principle applies.

Health Communication Analysis Assignments

(4 assignments: 3 @ 25 points, 1 @ 40 points; 115 points total)

Throughout the semester, you will complete three (3) written analyses of health communication. These analyses are spaced throughout the semester. Topics of the analyses will reflect readings you have completed during the semester. The topics of analysis include: Physical and Mental Health, Media & Health, Communicating Risk, and Aging and Health. The goal of these analyses is to apply your knowledge of the theories and concepts learned during class to better understand examples from the world at large.

Analysis 1 (25 points)

For Analysis 1, you have 4 options from you which you can choose.

Option 1: Read some (or all) of *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi. Analyze examples from *When Breath Becomes Air* using concepts, terms, and theories from the class.

Option 2: Watch the Netflix series “Tidying Up” with Marie Kondo. Connect examples from the show with concepts, terms, and theories from the class to analyze how environments of homes, hospitals, or offices of health professionals can influence physical, mental, and/or emotional health outcomes.

Option 3: Listen to a full episode of a health-related podcast, e.g., Found My Fitness with Rhonda Patrick, Huberman Lab, The Peter Attia Drive, On Purpose with Jay Shetty, School of Greatness with Lewis Howes, etc. (Note: there are many health-focused podcasts you can choose for this analysis). Analyze examples from the podcast using concepts, terms, and theories from the class.

Option 4: Select your own book, show, or documentary related to health. Connect examples from your selection with concepts, terms, and theories from the class to analyze influences on physical, mental, and/or emotional health outcomes.

Analysis 2: Media & Health (25 points)

Option 1: Choose a health image, advertisement, or video from any media of your choice (e.g., social media, a magazine, a billboard, a website, a commercial, a television episode). Analyze the selected health image, advertisement, or video using concepts, terms, and theories from class.

Analysis 3: Communicating Risk Project (40 points)

For this assignment, produce a summary of *Best Practices for Communicating Risk*. Create a professional product or document that you could use to present the *Best Practices for Communicating Risk* to a distinguished panel of medical experts.

Communicating risk is a complex process. This assignment requires you to do library research on how to communicate risks effectively. Specifically, this assignment requires five (5) research citations.

Step 1: Pick a risk context for your “best practices of communicating risk” assignment (e.g., diabetes, mental health, physical fitness, nutrition, sleeping, Alzheimer’s, rock climbing, youth sports, post-partum depression, flu vaccine, etc.).

Step 2: Do library research to find research studies on strategies for communicating risk in general, or research studies specifically on your chosen context.

Step 3: Synthesize your research on effective risk communication in the context you selected. Prepare a report that provides medical professionals with 5 specific recommendations for communicating risk.

Analysis 4: Aging & Health (25 points)

For Analysis 4, you have 4 options from you which you can choose.

Option 1: Read some (or all) of *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Analyze examples from *Tuesdays with Morrie* using concepts, terms, and theories from the class.

Option 2: Watch the Netflix series “Headspace: Guide to Meditation”. Connect examples from the show with concepts, terms, and theories from the class to analyze influences on physical, mental, and/or emotional health outcomes.

Option 3: Listen to a podcast focused on “healthy aging”, “longevity,” or a related topic. E.g., Lifespan with David Sinclair, Found My Fitness with Rhonda Patrick, The Optispan Podcast, Longevity Dialogues, etc. Analyze examples from the podcast using concepts, terms, and theories from the class.

Option 4: Read the *New Yorker* article, “Why we can’t tell the truth about aging”. Analyze examples from the article using concepts, terms, and theories from the class.

Exams

(4 exams, 40 points each, 160 points total)

Tests and exams are one way to measure your understanding and comprehension of course materials. For each exam, all assigned readings and all material covered in lecture should be considered of importance for the exam. Exams in this course will consist primarily of multiple-choice questions, but may also include true/false, matching, or essay questions as called for by the situation. Each exam will have a total of 20 questions, with each question worth 2 points (40 points total).

Grading scale:

A: (excellent, clearly outstanding)	270-300	(90-100%)
B: (very good, impressive)	240-269	(80-89%)
C: (average college-level)	210-239	(70-79%)
D: (below average, barely passing)	180-209	(60-69%)
F: (failing)	< 180	(0-59%)

Tracking Your Grade!

Assignment	Point Value	Your Score
Exams	-----	-----
Exam #1	40	
Exam #2	40	
Exam #3	40	
Exam #4	40	
In-Class Activities	-----	-----
Participation Activities & Quizzes	25	
Health Communication Analyses	-----	-----
Analysis #1	25	
Media & Health	25	
Communicating Risk	40	
Analysis #4	25	
Total	300	

COMM 3220
Health Communication
Spring 2026 Schedule

Unit 1: Foundations of Health Communication

Week	Dates	Topic	Tuesday	Thursday	Due Dates
1	Jan 13 -- Jan 15	Course Introduction	Course Introduction	Health & Health Communication	
2	Jan 20 – Jan 22	What is Health?	What is Health? Du Pre, Ch. 1	What is Health Communication? Designing the Perfect Health Team	
3	Jan 27 – Jan 28	The Current Landscape	Approaches to Treatment Du Pre, Ch. 2	Social Influences on Health	
4	Feb 3 – Feb 5	Patient Perspectives	Uncertainty; The Influence of Time Du Pre, Ch. 4	Patient Satisfaction; Key Variables in HC Research	Analysis #1: <i>Friday 2/6</i>
5	Feb 10 – Feb 12	Care Provider Perspectives	Caregiver Preparation Du Pre, Ch. 5	System-Level Influences; Psychological Influences	Exam #1 due: <i>Friday 2/13</i>

Unit 2: Technology, Media, & Crisis Communication

6	Feb 17 – Feb 19	Technology & Health	Theoretical Foundations Du Pre, Ch. 9	Motivations for Seeking Health Information; Technology	
7	Feb 24 – Feb 26	Media & Health	Health Images in the Media Du Pre, Ch. 11	DTC Advertising; Narratives of Health	Analysis #2 due: <i>Friday, 2/27</i>
8	Mar 3 – Mar 5	Public Health & Crisis Comm	What is Public Health? Du Pre, Ch. 12	Risk & Crisis Communication	Exam #2 due: <i>Friday, 3/6</i>
9	Mar 10 – Mar 12	Spring Break!			

Unit 3: Risk & Uncertainty					
Week	Dates	Topic	Tuesday	Thursday	Due Dates
10	Mar 17 – Mar 19	Prospect Theory	Judgments Under Uncertainty	Cognitive Biases; Health Decisions	
11	March 24 – March 26	Risk & Uncertainty	Conceptualizing Risk	Types of Risk; Risk & Health Communication	Analysis #3: <i>Communicating Risk; due Friday 3/27</i>
12	March 31 – April 2	Planning Health Promotion Campaigns	Planning Stages; Motivating Factors; Du Pre, Ch. 13	Exemplary Campaigns; Persuasive Health Messages	
13	April 7 – April 9	Designing Health Campaigns	Theories of Behavior Change Du Pre, Ch. 14	Evaluating Health Campaigns	Exam #3 due: <i>Friday 4/10</i>
Unit 4: Cognitive Health, Aging, & Time					
14	April 14 – April 16	Perspectives of Cognitive Health	Perspectives of Mental Health	Cognitive health	Analysis #4: <i>due Friday 4/17</i>
15	April 21 – April 23	Health & Aging	Brain Health	Health & Aging	
16	April 28 – April 30	Time & Health	Temporal Dimensions of Health	Temporal Dimensions of Health, Continued	
17	Finals Week		Exam #4 due Monday May 4 th at 11:59pm		Exam #4 due: <i>Monday 5/4 at 11:59pm</i>