

COMM 4520.400 Wintermester 2026

Theories of Persuasion

Remote Delivery; Canvas Platform

Professor: Dr. Joseph McGlynn

Email: Joseph.McGlynn@unt.edu

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

Zoom Office Hours Meeting ID: 942 5457 1761

Required Texts:

Cialdini, R. B. (2021). *Influence: Science and practice*. HarperCollins.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Optional texts:

Goldstein, N. J., Martin, S. J., & Cialdini, R. B. (2008). *Yes! 50 scientifically proven ways to be persuasive*. New York: Free Press.

Klosterman, C. (2016). *But what if we're wrong?* New York: Blue Rider.

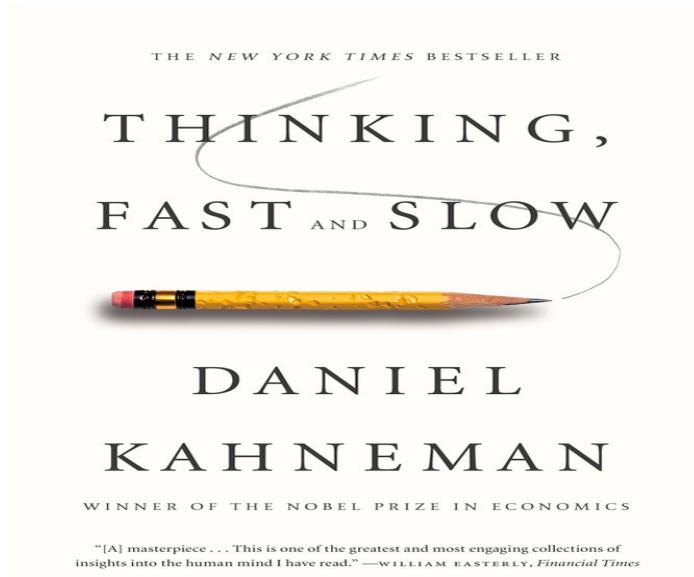
Cialdini, R. (2017). *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

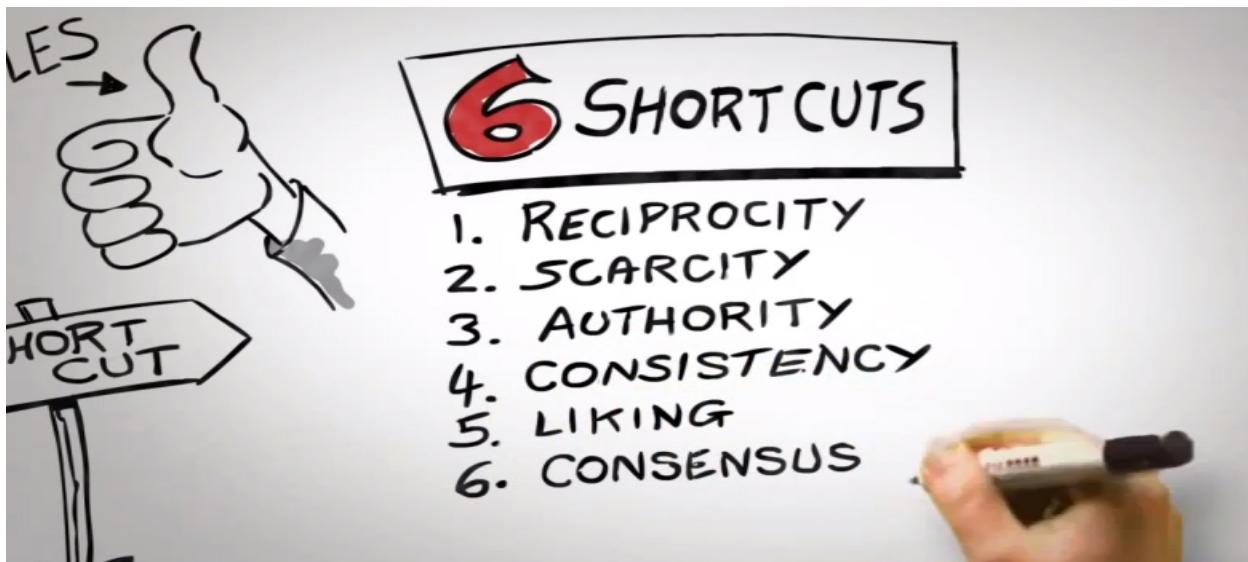
Course Description

The power of persuasion is all around us – but how does it work? Why are some people and messages more persuasive than others? This course explores the strategies of persuasion that people use to shape the attitudes and behaviors of others. The course explores persuasion across a variety of contexts and uses. We will discuss theories and findings that explain why, when, and how persuasive strategies have their effect. We will also investigate how strategies of persuasion in traditional interpersonal and mass media contexts are now being used in emerging digital and Internet technologies. This course is designed to sharpen your understanding of how and why persuasion occurs in interpersonal, rhetorical, organizational, and mass media contexts.

Learning Objectives

- Examine theoretical perspectives emphasizing the source, receiver, and message characteristics that play a role in persuasion
- Examine persuasion in both mass communication and interpersonal communication contexts
- Identify social influences of persuasion
- Identify cognitive influences of persuasion
- Discuss the importance and influence of cognitive heuristics
- Discuss inoculation strategies and resistance to persuasion attempts





Attendance Policy (UNT)

Responsibility for class attendance rests with the student. I reserve the right to request that a student be dropped from the course with a grade of "WF" upon the accumulation of a stated number of unexcused absences. An absence may be excused for the following reasons: a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose; active military service, including travel for that purpose; participation in an official university function; illness or other extenuating circumstances; pregnancy and parenting under Title IX; and when the University is officially closed by the President. The student is responsible for requesting an excused absence in writing as early in the semester as possible, and personally delivering to me satisfactory evidence to substantiate the excused absence.

Religious Holidays

In accordance with Section 51.911 of the *Texas Education Code*, UNT will allow a student who is absent from class for the observance of a religious holy day to take an examination or complete a scheduled assignment within a reasonable time. Students are required to file a written request with each professor within the first fifteen days of the semester to qualify for an excused absence.

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.

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. Final points will be available at the end of the course.

Academic Conduct

One fundamental goal of achieving a university degree is betterment of self; upon obtaining your degree you should be a more skilled writer and a more analytical thinker. To accomplish this goal and realize your true potential, all work should be uniquely your own in both word and thought. You should correctly document all words and ideas belonging to others according to APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines. Otherwise, you will not only fail yourself, but the course as well. Please consult the Code of Student Conduct for further information.

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. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Firearms Policy

The University of North Texas is committed to providing a safe environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors, and to respecting the right of individuals who are licensed to carry a handgun where permitted by law. Individuals who are licensed to carry may do so on campus premises except in locations and at Activities prohibited by law or by this policy. Open carry is not permitted. See 04.001 Carrying of Concealed Handguns on Campus policy for more details.

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/

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 Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

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 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 students' 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.

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 Perceptions of Teaching Effectiveness

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 and 14 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 at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu.

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 4520: Theories of Persuasion. 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 & Online Activities

(65 points total)

Reading is a key component to maximizing learning. Quizzes over the reading assignments will provide opportunities to demonstrate your dedication to the reading and your understanding of the course material.

In addition to reading quizzes, we will also have online activities. These activities are opportunities to participate in the learning process during class periods. They will be extemporaneous in nature and completed on Canvas.

Persuasion Analysis Assignments

(3 assignments, 25 points each, 75 points total)

Throughout the semester, you will complete three (3) written analyses of persuasion in everyday life. These analyses are spaced throughout the semester. Topics of the analyses will reflect the current topics for that week in the semester. The topics of analysis include: Reciprocity (Week 3), Social Proof (Week 6), and The Lazy Controller (Week 9).

For each assignment, complete a one-page single-spaced paper in which you 1) identify and describe the topic or context of interest 2) offer a pertinent and lively example of the topic to analyze, and 3) provide scholarly analysis of your example.

Each analysis should revolve around an example from your own life; be it something that you have read, seen, heard, watched, smelled, or otherwise experienced that relates to the specified persuasive topic. The analyses should demonstrate that you are observing carefully and thinking critically about how to apply the topics learned in class to outside examples in your own life. Grades for analyses will be based on the relevance of the example described and your ability to connect the example thoughtfully to course concepts and persuasion research.

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.

Exams

(3 exams, 40 points each, 120 points total)

Tests and exams are one way to measure your understanding and comprehension of course materials. Exams in this course will consist of multiple-choice questions. Each exam will have a total of 20 questions, with each question worth 2 points (40 points total).

For each exam, all assigned readings and all material covered in lecture videos should be considered of importance for the exam.

Grading scale:

A: (excellent, clearly outstanding)	234-260	(90-100%)
B: (very good, impressive)	208-233	(80-89%)
C: (satisfactory, average college-level)	182-207	(70-79%)
D: (below average, barely passing)	156-181	(60-69%)
F: (failing)	< 155	(0-59%)

Tracking Your Grade!

Assignment	Point Value	Your Score
Exams	-----	-----
Exam #1	40	
Exam #2	40	
Exam #3	40	
Online Activities	-----	-----
Quizzes & Activities	65	
Persuasion Analysis Assignments	-----	-----
Analysis #1: Reciprocity	25	
Analysis #2: Social Proof	25	
Analysis 3: The Lazy Controller	25	
Total	260	

Comm 4520: Theories of Persuasion

2025–2026 Wintermester Schedule

Unit 1: Principles of Persuasion

Session	Dates	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1	December 15 th	Course Introduction	Frank R. Stockton: The Lady or The Tiger?	
2	December 16 th	Click-Whirr; Heuristics	<i>Cialdini</i> 1 – 35	
3	December 17 th	Reciprocity	<i>Cialdini</i> 36 – 72	<i>Analysis #1, Reciprocity, due December 19th</i>
4	December 18 th	Consistency & Commitment	<i>Cialdini</i> 291 – 362 <i>Goldstein book,</i> <i>Ch. 1, Ch. 19</i>	
	December 18 – December 22	Exam #1		<i>Opens 10am 12/18/25 Closes 11pm 12/22/25</i>

Unit 2: Social Influences

Session	Dates	Topic	Readings	Assignments
5	December 19 th	Social Proof	<i>Cialdini</i> 127 – 159 <i>Cialdini</i> 160 – 198 <i>Goldstein Ch. 2</i>	
6	December 22 nd	Liking, Attraction, & Similarity	<i>Cialdini</i> 73 – 125	
7	December 23 rd	Authority	<i>Cialdini</i> 199 – 240	<i>Analysis #2, Social Proof, due January 2nd</i>
8	January 2 nd	Scarcity & Instant Influence	<i>Cialdini</i> 240 – 290 <i>Cialdini</i> 437 – 446	
	December 23 rd – January 2 nd	Exam #2		<i>Opens 10am 12/23/25 Closes 11pm 1/2/26</i>

Unit 3: Thinking, Fast & Slow

Session	Dates	Topic	Readings	Assignments
9	January 5 th	System 1 & 2: Attention & Effort	<i>Kahneman</i> 19 – 30 <i>Kahneman</i> 31 – 38	
10	January 6 th	The Lazy Controller; Cognitive Ease	<i>Kahneman</i> 39 – 49 <i>Kahneman</i> 59 – 70	
11	January 7 th	Prospect Theory; The Endowment Effect	<i>Kahneman</i> 278 – 288 <i>Kahneman</i> 289 – 299	<i>Analysis #3, The Lazy Controller, due January 8th</i>
12	January 8 th	The Anchoring Effect; Pre-suasion & Gut Feelings		
13	January 9 th	Timing & Persuasion		
	January 7 – January 9	Exam #3		<i>Opens 10am 1/7/26 Closes 11pm 1/9/26</i>