



A NEWSLETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



“It is rare indeed that people give. Most people guard and keep; they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be.”

-From the author James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time, which Aaron Lowe read and quoted from

Professors Kent Ono and Avery Holton quoted in stories on missing people of color and the Gabby Petito case

Dr. Kent Ono was interviewed for an article by the Associated Press on missing people of color and news visibility. In regard to the visibility of cases involving missing Asians and Asian Americans, he said that the “model minority myth,” that Asians are successful and don’t get into trouble, contributes to the problem.

Dr. Avery Holton was featured on Univision Salt Lake City last Wednesday to discuss the lack of attention paid by the public and media to cases of missing people of color. Holton detailed how Gabby and Brian left a digital trail that provoked the attention of the nation. This attention was good and helped the case, but highlights the need to make the cases of people of color more visible.





Alumni Melissa Parks featured in recent issue of Communication Currents

In her essay, "Ecocultural adjustment: revisiting acculturation through a Peace Corps sojourn" Department of Communication alumni Melissa Parks examines ecocultural adjustment, which refers to understanding the relationship between one's body and the new environment. Her essay was featured in a recent issue of Communication Currents. Melissa Parks is currently a postdoctoral scholar at the Humanities and Social Change Center at UC Santa Barbara.

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Shoshana Zuboff : "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism"
October 28, 2021 @ 12PM (Virtual)

RPT DATES

- 1** RPT committee meets to vote on reports
- 29** Final RPT meeting minutes due
- 30** RPT materials (report, minutes, chair letter) sent to candidate for review

CRASH COURSE

Relational Communication with Emily Krebs

Like many courses in our Department, COMM 3040: Relational Communication blends traditional academic study with practical skills-building. The goal of the course is for students to learn about relational communication theories, and apply those theories to improve their own relationships and communicative practices.

We also take a critical perspective and discuss nontraditional relational formations such as polyamory, care webs, asexual romantic bonds, and cross-dis/ability dating. My goal with this critical angle is twofold: (1) for students to more fully understand the sociocultural norms that constrain/support their personal relationships, and (2) for them to be empowered to pursue the types of relationships they want to form in the future.

I think of COMM 3040 as a place for curiosity and exploration as well as theory-driven learning. Because relational communication is a deeply interdisciplinary field, students from a wide range of majors find interest in comparing and applying theories stemming from psychology, biology, sociology, economics, and more. We explore questions like:

How do queer relationships challenge bioevolutionary theories?

What can Gossip Girl teach us about social identity theory and relational aggression?

How can economics (affection exchange theory) help us understand our social media use?

In addition to these queries, this semester's students are also pulling our conversations toward exploring how COVID-19 impacts how we are able to—or interested in—connecting with one another. Since the course meets face-to-face, conversations about pandemic relationships feel particularly impactful.

No matter the topic, students have lots to say during class discussions. Whether it's sharing dating horror stories or asking complex questions about familial norms and their links with race and culture, students seem to appreciate this course for its openness to exploring topics that are otherwise difficult to discuss with others. This is particularly powerful given our cultural context in Utah.

While encouraging these playful explorations, COMM 3040 also engages the “dark sides” of relational communication. Through readings, journal reflections, and larger course projects, we spend a great deal of time attending to our own potential for harming others. The final third of the course centers the development of practical, harm-reducing skills such as setting boundaries with family, taking accountability when we've been abusive, and supporting others during mental health crises in ways that avoid institutional abuse and coercion.

While COMM 3040 is taught differently by each instructor, its emphasis on bridging theory and praxis empowers students to be more engaged, reflexive, and thoughtful members of our campus community. Alongside my students, I know I'm becoming a more conscientious relational communicator as I teach it.

Us Upfront

Dr. Robin Jensen

If I didn't work in education, I would be:

an ice-skater and maybe an archaeologist

Most memorable college class I took:

Existentialist Philosophy

If I was a student now, I would:

take more electives

Fictional character I'm most like:

Mare of Easttown (just kidding, but I LOVE that show)

Last book I finished:

Molokai and Honolulu by Alan Brennert in paperback; Empire of Pain by Patrick Radden Keefe and More than Medicine by LaTonya Trotter on Audible.

Last movie I saw

One Second directed by Zhang Yimou via the Toronto Film Festival

Songs that pump me up

Best of my Love (The Emotions), 9 to 5 (Dolly Parton), The Joke (Brandie Carlile)

I hope that my students...

learn to foster their sense of ongoing curiosity. I hope that they begin to generate their own, unique questions about the world that they live in and look for answers far and wide (but ideally from a credible source).

