

Erika Solis Teaching Portfolio

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Teaching Philosophy

As a professor, I have three main goals for my students. First, I promote active learning and take steps to engage them in a topic. Second, I seek out student feedback to tailor the course to their goals and improve my material for the next semester. Finally, I aim to create a safe and welcoming environment for my students to express their thoughts and opinions freely.

Through the Union College of New Jersey (UCNJ), one of the institutions I teach at, I've completed an Active Learning course. This 6-week course is credited through the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE). It is intended to teach instructors ways of promoting active learning, such as facilitating class discussions, using groups to promote an active learning cycle, and teaching students how to take effective notes. I take the lessons from each module and apply them to my classes. Most recently, I implemented a group in-class activity within my courses at UCNJ, in which they picked an Instagram influencer and applied the many aspects of impression management, helping them understand why we view social media users in a particular light, and how they may use it towards their own professional accounts.

Second, I value student feedback and give them the space to ask questions to ensure there's a clear understanding of the topic among my students. Currently, I'm an instructor of record at three institutions with different types of students. I've had to adapt my lectures to fit the student demographic in my classroom. In one class, it is primarily students who recently graduated high school. In another, it is predominantly non-traditional students. Their questions during class help me bring forth relevant examples that apply more to them. I'm grateful for my students, as many actively ask questions and bring forth their concerns with a topic. It can be challenging to make adjustments on the spot, but I thrive in an environment where I need to improvise and reexplain a topic in a completely different manner.

Lastly, I care deeply and work hard towards creating a welcoming environment for my students where they feel open to sharing their opinions with me and their classmates through both the lectures and in-class activities. For instance, in my Gaming & Interactive Media course at Penn State, I addressed various groups that have faced persecution within the industry. In my Public Speaking course at Gwynedd Mercy University, I actively seek public speakers from all backgrounds. I avoid only showing one perspective to avoid pushing students who may have opposing views into silence. For students who struggled to discuss in class, I included a small in-class assignment within my Gaming & Interactive Media course. My students would be asked a short question randomly during the lecture and submit their hand-written assignments in class. These brief activities allowed students who may be quieter to share their thoughts on the course material with me in a way that did not pressure them to speak in front of others. At Washington College, I would continue this work toward creating a welcoming classroom that encourages students to speak up and find ways to continue active learning measures.

Summary of Feedback

Quantitative Feedback

At Penn State, official student evaluations are primarily qualitative-oriented with limited quantitative options. However, on a scale of 1-5 across the four courses I have finished teaching thus far at Penn State, I was consistently ranked highly across my courses with the overall structure of the course and providing a meaningful learning experience (M=4.45). I was also rated highly for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment (M=4.5). Currently, I am awaiting official feedback for Fall 2024 from my current institutions and can provide further official quantitative feedback upon semester completion upon request.

Qualitative Feedback

Below are quotes pulled directly from official student evaluations.

- “The class was very open and Professor Solis gave us the floor before or after class to ask questions about the material that we have learned. The in-class reactions used to mark attendance also had us reflect on our own habits and since they were not read aloud to the entire class, I felt very open about sharing what I thought of the material.”
- “I am taking this course as a Gen-Ed for my Biochemistry major, but I felt that this course was extremely fun and rewarding. I enrolled in the course to talk more about the gaming industry and the slides combined with Professor Solis' teaching made the class extremely enjoyable. I like that we focused a lot on the business side and how marketing/esports makes the industry go round instead of just focusing on how games themselves are made. The course was very multifaceted but the material was easy and enjoyable to complete.”
- “Erika is a really enjoyable lecturer. They allow room for conversation, and I just like the style of the class.”
- “They seem to be very communicative. I feel as though if I don't understand something or if I need something explained I will have no problem with reaching out. Also, the instructor does a good job replying to discussions made by students, they reply with messages offering their point of view on the responses.”
- “As a trans student, I really appreciated the open environment Erika created throughout the class by being so open about themselves.”

Addressing Feedback

“Maybe do something little more fun of the class instead of just doing PowerPoints and maybe do hands on video game experience.”

This short quote from the very first class I taught independently stuck with me, and it’s something I’ve worked towards. With my current in-person courses having, on average, 16 students, I’ve been able to explore working with my students to avoid only lecturing fully. In my courses this semester, I gave my students a mid-semester open-ended survey. It’s intended to help me improve my lessons and examples in the classroom, but also understand the culture that is being created in my classroom. Notably, these surveys are anonymous and submitted privately through Canvas. Right now, these surveys are more important than ever. It helps me pinpoint any issues and find solutions that work for as many students as possible. It also gives students a voice and makes sure they know their voice matters in the classroom.

- “I am enjoying every bit of this class the explanation helps a lot, you dedicated to help your students and passionate about your work.”
- “So far, the class has been quite enjoyable. I really like how dynamic it is. Even when the oral presentation in front of the class was quite stressful, I appreciated how the professor tried to maintain a respectful and quiet environment for everyone to feel more comfortable with it. I like the environment in general during the class.”
- “I feel like the content for the most part is pretty useful in everyday life. I like the fact we learn about how the human mind works during social environments. I just like how the information is actually important to our society. I think the class flows very well too, lectures aren't boring or lethargic.”

One takeaway from this survey was that students did enjoy the material and activities. Still, a few wanted a more unambiguous indication of how they could apply interpersonal communication (and our material as a whole) to their everyday lives and careers. With this in mind, I’ve decided to experiment with my activities. I teach two sections of the same course and decided to start asking different guiding questions between them. In one, I stuck with the same type of activities, giving my students hypothetical scenarios and examples. In the other, I asked them to use examples from their own lives directly. After testing out this change for a few classes, I’ve opted to incorporate both types of activities. As these courses are two days a week, I create hypothetical scenarios for material that may be more difficult for students to consider on the spot and ask for examples when the topic is more manageable.

Syllabus

ENG 128: The Dynamics of Communication

Erika Solis (they/them/theirs)

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MW 3:00pm-4:15pm

Office Hours: 1:30PM-3:00PM MW; Other times available upon request

Course Overview

This course involves the study of human relationships with an emphasis on communication as a process. Topics covered will include self-concept, perception, listening, language, assertiveness, and conflict resolution and their roles in human relationships. Communication concepts will be supplemented by classroom exercises.

Objectives

Students who complete all coursework and attend most of the classes will be able to showcase knowledge in the following topics:

1. Strengthen their small and large group oral communication skills.
2. Strengthen their individual platform speaking skills
3. Strengthen their knowledge of the fundamentals of research
4. Improve their writing and reading skills
5. Recognize and define interpersonal communication as a process
6. Develop an increasing consciousness of the roles they play in that process
7. Distinguish between verbal and nonverbal messages and understand the inseparable nature of the two
8. Become more aware of the channels through which communication occurs and the interaction of different communication environments
9. Understand the kinds of interference that inevitably take place in human communication
10. Understand the key roles of listening, language, self-concept and perception in interpersonal communication
11. Strengthen conflict resolution skills

Classroom Policies

You will all be future professionals with responsibilities to your career, coworkers, and here, with your fellow students. Thus, please keep the following in mind when taking this course:

- *Attendance:* As this course consistently focuses on communicating with others, engagement is essential. Consistently arriving late or missing class can quickly prove detrimental to your grade, as you will not be able to understand the material thoroughly. If you miss a class, I can answer clarifying questions, but it is up to you to review the course material. All lectures will be available on Canvas. However, do not rely solely on

going over the slides online! If you must miss several classes, please let me know as soon as possible. Communication is key.

- *Technology:* It's understood that laptops and tablets are helpful for taking notes. Please do not use it to message or browse online to ensure you're paying attention and avoid disrupting your classmates. Phones are not allowed in the classroom. If you must take a phone call or send a text, please step outside to avoid distracting other students.
- *Presentation Etiquette:* We will be giving multiple presentations in this class. Please ensure you are acting appropriately when your peers (and myself!) are talking in front of the class. Give your undivided attention, as everyone works hard on their assignments, and please show respect to one another.
- *Late Policy:* All assignments have set deadlines. If you submit past the deadline, it is a 20% point deduction per day, and will not receive full credit. No assignments will be accepted after five days. If you have an emergency that prevents you from submitting the assignment on time, I will require some form of documentation. Please contact me if there are circumstances you know ahead of time that may prevent you from submitting on time.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

Union County College offers reasonable accommodations and/or services to persons with disabilities. Any student who has a documented disability and wishes to self-identify should contact the Coordinator of Disability Support Services at (908) 709-7164, or email disabilitysvc@ucc.edu. Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. In order to receive accommodations, students must be registered with Disability Support Services. Students should register with the office as soon as possible. Accommodations are not official until the Faculty Accommodations Alert Form(s) are issued from the student to their instructor(s).

Union County College does not discriminate and prohibits discrimination, as required by state and/or federal law, in all programs and activities, including employment and access to its career and technical programs.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

The FERPA Statement can be found at

<https://www.ucc.edu/admissions/the-family-education-rights-and-privacy-act/>

Course Schedule

The visual calendar provides a schedule of in-class topics, exact due dates, etc. [Please see this Google Doc for more details](#). A full list of general topics will be included at the bottom of the syllabus; please see the visual calendar for exact dates. **I will provide notice in class if anything changes on the calendar!**

Keep in mind a few classes are canceled throughout the semester, so ensure you know these dates so you do not accidentally come into class.

Required Text

A majority of our lectures will correspond with a chapter from the book. This book can be found at the [UCNJ college bookstore](#). While it is not required to purchase the book directly from the store, please be careful when buying online to avoid accidentally buying the wrong edition.

- *Looking Out, Looking In* (15th edition) by Ronald B. Adler, Russell F. Proctor II.
ISBN 10: 1305076516

Grading

This class contains five assignments, with a total of 100 points. Below is the distribution of points, as well as a general explanation of what each assignment will entail. You will be given proper notice of when an assignment is due and the opportunity to ask me questions prior to submission:

- Social Media Reflection: 10 points
- Self-Perception Presentation: 15 points
- People Watching - Nonverbal Communication: 20 points
 - Paper: 10 points
 - Presentation or Face-to-Face Meeting: 10 points
- Small Group Presentation: 20 points
 - In-Class Meeting: 10 points
 - Presentation: 10 points
- Case Study Final Paper: 35 points
 - Final Paper: 20 points
 - Presentation or Face-to-Face Meeting: 10 points
 - Proposal Outline: 5 points

Presentations and Face-to-Face Meetings

- As this class discusses different forms of communication, students will have the option to complete a face-to-face meeting in place of a presentation for the People Watching and Social Exchange Theory Case Study assignments. A face-to-face meeting is a conversation with me about your assignment. I will come prepared with a few questions for you to expand upon your topic, but I will also ask more specific questions as they arise. Conversations are capped at 10 minutes.
 - If you do not sign up for a time slot, you will be defaulted to presentations.
- If you opt to have a face-to-face meeting, you will sign up for a time slot (the day varies depending on the assignment; see calendar). Please note that there are a limited number of time slots.

- People Watching - Nonverbal Communication
 - Sign-up deadline: October 30
 - Meetings: November 6
- Social Exchange Theory Case Study
 - Sign-up deadline: December 11
 - Meeting: December 18

Social Media Reflection (10 points)

Due Date: September 20

How do you use social media? In class, we will complete a reflective questionnaire on how you use social media. Based on your responses to these questions, you will write a two page double space paper on how you use social media and answer the following questions:

- Are you more interested in interacting with friends via social media than in person?
 - If you are, what might you be missing?
- Do you find yourself impulsively checking social media?
 - If so, what platforms and why?
 - If not, why?
- How many hours do you spend online? Is this a healthy or unhealthy amount of time?
- In your opinion, what's a healthy balance of mediated and face-to-face communication in your life?

Self-Perception Presentation (15 points)

Presentation Dates: October 7 & 9

Create a presentation with a minimum of 6 slides (max 10 slides) that contain representations of the following aspects of your identity. You may choose to combine these aspects on your slides in any manner you like or use one slide for each element. Visuals are highly recommended/encouraged.

- Personality— examples: likes, dislikes, outlook (positive, unsure, etc...)
- Roles—examples: husband, wife, daughter, son, sister, brother, supervisor, crew member, student
- Abilities and/or disabilities— examples: specific talents or hobbies, physical issues that might influence perceptions
- Culture—examples: age, family background, and current family status, belief system, ethnicity, living conditions, traditions, music
- Goals and priorities—examples: family goals, self-actualization goals, professional priorities
- Experiences and social habits—examples: travel, education, club or church membership, watching television, shopping, playing video games, going out to dinner with family

People Watching - Nonverbal Communication (20 points)

Paper: 10 points

Due Date: November 8

- This 3-page double-spaced paper will require you to “people watch” in three different locations to observe forms of non-verbal communication for 20-30 minutes. You may select any locations of your choosing, so long as they are distinctly different locations. Make sure to take detailed notes to ensure you can write the paper. Answer the following questions for each location:
 - Where did you go? Set the scene - what does it look like? What time did you go?
 - What types of non-verbal communication messages occurred? How did people react to them?
 - Apply characteristics of non-verbal communication from the book - what types of characteristics did you observe?
 - Do these communication messages and characteristics make sense for the location?
- Please do not take pictures of people

Presentation or Face-to-Face Meeting: 10 points

Presentations: November 4

Face to Face: November 6

- If you choose to do a presentation, this presentation should be 5 minutes and should present your answers to the questions above and summarize the answers to the questions from the paper. You may use visuals that show an example of the location or non-verbal communication messages (aka stock images) but do not take pictures of people.
- Please see earlier in the syllabus for the face-to-face details.

Small Group Presentation (20 points)

- In the middle of the semester, your groups will be provided a list of types of interpersonal communication. Select 3-4 topics (one per group member) and discuss how all of your topics connect to one film. You must select the film as a group, and I must approve it before starting the assignment. Your presentation must be 15-20 minutes, with each person speaking at least 5 minutes each.

Social Exchange Theory Case Study (35 points)

Final Paper: 20 points

Due Date: December 20

For your final paper, you will be writing a paper (4 pages double-spaced) on social exchange theory. There will be a list of case studies you may use. If you think of an original idea or find a similar scenario online you'd like to write about, you may do so. However, I must approve this. The paper must include the following:

- Introduction
- Summary of the case
- Application of Social Exchange Theory
 - Perceived benefits
 - Perceived costs
 - What is the individual's rationale?
- How may this theory be helpful and/or unhelpful in understanding future co-workers or leadership in your workplace?
- Conclusion

Presentation or Face-to-Face Meeting: 10 points

Presentations: December 16

Face to Face: December 18

- If you choose to do a presentation, this presentation should be 5 minutes and should present your answers to the questions above and summarize the answers to the questions from the paper. You may use visuals to help communicate your findings, but they are not required for this assignment.
- Please see earlier in the syllabus for the face-to-face details.

Proposal Outline: 5 points

Due Date: December 6

- Prior to writing the paper, you must submit an outline that covers everything mentioned for the final paper. This outline will follow a template, which will be provided later in the semester.

Course Topics

Please see the visual calendar for the exact dates of the topics.

1. A First Look at Interpersonal Communication.
2. Interpersonal Communication and Social Media.
3. Communication and Identity: Creating and Presenting the Self.
4. Perception: What You See Is What You Get.
5. Emotions: Feeling, Thinking, and Communicating.
6. Language: Barrier and Bridge.
7. Nonverbal Communication: Messages Beyond Words.
8. Listening: More Than Meets the Ear.
9. Communication and Relational Dynamics.
10. Communication in Close Relationships.
11. Improving Communication Climates.
12. Managing Interpersonal Conflicts.
13. Interpersonal Communication Theory
14. Media Literacy

Assignment: Shark Tank Group Project

ENG 200: Public Speaking, Gwynedd Mercy University

This group speech is intended to take elements of the previous three speeches and combine them to create a business pitch for an item that will improve a college student's experience. Like the Shark Tank videos we watched and discussed in class, you will be pitching us a product. It can be something serious or something lighthearted. Consider some of the examples we saw in class, and how they were promoted. Many are simple in nature but have a big impact when explained the right way. For the product itself, you can take inspiration from other shark tank products (shown or not shown in class) or products you all use in everyday life. **However, do not copy an existing business' product word for word.** Two class periods (November 5 and 7) will be dedicated to working on the assignment in class, as this assignment requires more research than the average speech. You must still attend these classes. I will be taking time to discuss their products and ways to maximize their time with each group directly.

General Criteria

- Your speech will be 15-20 minutes, roughly 5 minutes per person. There is a Q&A component to this, with no hard time limit.
 - Some of the questions will be provided ahead of time; easier questions will be offered during the speech itself.
 - I will come prepared with multiple questions about your products, which will be shared in class on November 7.
 - Students in class can ask questions; I ask that you take it seriously and avoid overly complex questions.
- Visuals are required. Similar to previous assignments, this can be pictures, objects, models, etc. Videos and audio are acceptable, up to two minutes.
 - This does count towards your time limit; pick audio and videos carefully.
- Participation plays a role in your grade. This portion is graded individually and may impact other parts of your grade if you are not able to contribute appropriately to the assignment.

Speech Criteria

- Introduction
 - You'll introduce yourselves as if we do not know you.
 - Some background on each one of you
 - Include the name of your business
- Product (Incorporate general background on the product)
 - How did you come up with the idea?
 - What was the inspiration? Was it based on your own experiences?
 - What problem are you trying to solve?

- Are people happier? Safer? More efficient? Etc.
 - How much will the product cost you to produce?
 - And how much are you selling it for?
 - What sorts of problems do you anticipate?
 - How would you fix this?
 - What makes you different from your competitors?
 - Better customer support? More reliable product?
- Demonstration
 - A visual element is required to showcase how the product will work or appear. This can consist of a visual mock-up, real-world item of similar variations, a video, etc. This is to ensure we, as the audience, know what the product looks like and how it might function.
- What type of college students will buy your product?
 - Consider the different types of audiences and demographics we discussed in class and how this may apply to college students. This can include, but is not limited to:
 - Gender
 - Hobbies
 - Major
 - Income
- Future Plans - now that you've explained your product and why we should invest:
 - What are the next steps?
 - How could you grow/modify/change the product?
 - What could you do with additional funding?

Group Participation

- If you believe a group member did not participate or contribute to the assignment, please let me know as soon as possible. If you are found to have low effort in the project, you will receive a lower grade than the rest of your group.

In-Class Activity: “Build-a-Friend”

ENG 128: Dynamics of Communications, Union College of New Jersey

Note: These in-class activity directions were originally incorporated on a PowerPoint slide and have been adjusted to include a portion of my spoken direction.

To further understand Social Exchange Theory and how it applies to our everyday lives, we are going to “build-a-friend.” In pairs, you will go over the traits on the board and pick characteristics you both agree are good to have in a friend. Your pair will be given a few minutes to discuss this, and you must come to a consensus. I am going to ask several pairs to “introduce” us to the person and their traits.

Discussion Questions

- What made you pick these traits?
 - Was there anything you both agreed on easily? Or disagreed?
 - Were there any categories in which you wanted to pick more than one trait?
- Were there any traits you believed are deal breakers? Or concerning to have in a friend?
 - Why or why not?
 - Were any traits considered “too costly”?
- If you were asked to redo this but instead to “build-a-manager,” how might this change your existing list of traits?

Personality (Pick 3)

Charitable	Blunt	Romantic
Patient	Sarcastic	Stubborn
Sense of humor	Outspoken	Intelligent
Independent	Compassionate	Extroverted
Rude	Playful	Competitive
Unstable	Critical	Protective
Worries a lot	Disorganized	Deceptive
High-self esteem	Honest	Proud

Occupation (Pick 1)**Health/Lifestyle (Pick 1)**

Astronaut	Priest	Allergic to dogs	Color blind
Farmer	Dog groomer	Smokes 3 packs a day	Insomnia
Dentist	Nurse	Perfect hearing	Morning person
Secretary	Pilot	“Couch potato”	High anxiety
Mechanic	Chef	Frequent headaches	Never smoked
Lawyer	Referee	Goes to gym weekly	Vegan diet
Garbage collector	Musician	Legally blind	Never gets sick
Artist	Unemployed	Addicted to drugs	Night owl

Hobbies (Pick 1)**Financial Situation (Pick 1)**

Guitar playing	Golf	\$100k in student loans	Constantly maxes out credit cards
Pottery	Woodworking	Gives expensive gifts	Sticks to a budget
Acting	Roller skating	\$5k in savings	Buys/hoards a lot
Baking	Soap carving	Owens Cybertruck	Owens a house
Video games	Trainspotting	Plays lottery a lot	Millionaire
Glassblowing	Dance	Doesn't trust banks	Has a 401k
Archery	Beekeeping	Philanthropist	Chronic gambler
Creative Writing	Sewing	Supported by parents	Never has cash