

Territorial acknowledgement: This course takes place on the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwepemc people - lands where health and well-being thrived for millennia, yet for a period of history and up to the present day, attempts have been made to use disease(s) to harm and even eradicate the Secwepemc people. We will explore some of this history in the course, with an aim to better understand how language choices both serve and harm the health of people here and elsewhere in the world.



THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

Course Outline

Communication and Visual Arts
Faculty of Arts

CMNS 3500-01 – 3 Credits

Selected Topics in Communication and Public Relations

**Language and Power: Clarity, Accessibility and Persuasion in Health Messaging (3,0,0)
Fall 2025**

Instructor: Christine Adam

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Office: 1841 Old Main

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 1:00-2:30

Calendar Description

Students explore a selection of contemporary topics in communication theory and practice as they relate to public relations. Topics may vary depending on faculty and student interest and current developments in the field.

Course Description

This course applies Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to health communication, from clinical encounters with health professionals, to public health campaigns, to controversial health claims. A key focus will be analysing language's social and cultural functions, exploring how language choices persuade, mislead, or build trust. Students will analyze authentic texts and develop communication strategies grounded in SFL theory.

Educational Objectives/Outcomes

Upon successfully completing this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain core concepts of SFL, including ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.
2. Evaluate the clarity, tone, and credibility of health communications in varied genres.
3. Apply SFL to design effective and ethically responsible health messages.
4. Analyze both trustworthy and misleading health texts using SFL frameworks.
5. Deconstruct the linguistic strategies used in controversial and false health claims.
6. Reflect critically on the ideological role of language in shaping public health debates.

Prerequisites

Completion of 45 credits (any discipline) or permission of the Department Chair

Texts/Materials

Course readings and material for analysis will be posted on the course WordPress site. Please review it regularly, as I will be updating it as the course progresses.

Student Evaluation

(full descriptions will be placed in the WordPress site for this course; assignments to be submitted in Moodle)

- Short Analytic Exercises – Weeks 2, 3, 4 (15%)
- Key Concepts Exam – October 8 (20%)
- Group Wellness Centre Project (20%)
- Seminar Presentation (30%)
- Final In-Class task (15%)

**** Note that many of the assignments will be done in-class. Please talk to me if you are going to miss, or have missed, in-class assignments.**

Course Topics

Date	Topics
Sept 3	Introduction to SFL and health communication; Moodle and WordPress site overviews
Sept 10	Ideational Metafunction: Representing bodies, disease, and risk
Sept 17	Interpersonal Metafunction: Trust, authority, and stance
Sept 24	Textual Metafunction: Thematic structure and coherence
October 1	Multimodal analysis
Oct 8	In-class Mid-term Exam: Key Concepts
Oct 15	Bringing the metafunctions together. Wellness centre visit and task introduction
Oct 22	Health literacy and plain language: Barriers and solutions.
Oct 29	TBA
Nov 5	Wellness Centre presentations
Nov 12	Controversial Claims I: Vaccine skepticism, alternative medicine, and language of anti-science discourse. (Student Seminars)
Nov 19	Controversial Claims II: Grammar of misinformation—modality, passives, nominalization (Student Seminars)
Nov 26	Social Media and the language of health: Clickbait, metaphor, sensationalism. (Student Seminars)
Dec 3	Final In-class task: Designing ethical health communication: Navigating misinformation, accessibility, and trust

Accessibility Services: <https://www.tru.ca/as.html>

TRU's [Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy \(BRD 10-0\)](#) outlines the university's responsibilities to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Accessibility Services at TRU provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact Accessibility Services at 250-828-5023 or as@tru.ca for support. *Students and faculty now have access to a user-friendly student services portal. After students are approved for academic accommodations for the upcoming semester, they can log into the student services portal with their TRU credentials and send their accommodation letter directly to their instructor(s).* See [Accessibility Services](#) for more information.

Academic Honesty and Attendance

Students must be familiar with and follow the following TRU policies:

- [Academic Integrity, Policy ED-5-0](#). Resources for compliance with this policy can be found at the [Academic Integrity Centre](#) website.
- [Student Attendance, Policy ED 3-1](#)

Students should expect these policies to be enforced in this course. All policies can be found online at <https://www.tru.ca/policy.html>

A word about Generative Artificial Intelligence:

I am aware of the advent of generative AI technology, and I can see the potential of you using these tools to complete the work for this class. However, I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the limitations of these tools and to engage in careful revision, editing, and fact-checking of anything AI produces for you. You are also required to disclose any use of AI in this course either in the introduction to the assignment or in an appended document. This disclosure should include screen shots of the prompts you gave AI and its output. Failure to undertake careful revisions or to disclose AI use may result in significant grade penalties.

Generative AI is changing the way many of us do our jobs, including me. I have employed the use of generative AI to help develop assignment topics and, in fact, the very first draft of this course outline (it looks very different now, but ChatGPT got something on the blank screen). Any time I use AI in the class, you can expect me to disclose where and how I used it. We are all learning how to use this technology responsibly, and I hope we can have further discussion if you have any questions.

source: <https://aieducation.trubox.ca/syllabus-language/>