Psychology of Communication (IEEL006)

IEEL006  5 credit module (equivalent to 2.5 ECTS)

1. Module Leader

Gayle Brewer

Biography. I have worked in Higher Education since 2003 and joined the University of Liverpool in 2017. Research interests focus on the psychology of romantic relationships from an evolutionary perspective. I have published widely in this subject area (e.g. relationship conflict and control) and my research is regularly featured in the national and international press.

2. Module Description

The module will examine theory and research related to the psychology of communication. A range of communication types will be considered; these include intentional and unintentional communication and verbal and non-verbal signals. Particular emphasis will be placed on those factors (e.g. context) influencing the form and effectiveness of communication.

3. Module Aims

The module aims to:
- Introduce students to research and theory in the area of psychology of communication
- Develop confidence in understanding and communicating complex ideas in written language
- Develop skills in research and collaborative learning

4. Content

The module will cover the following topics:
- Communication in romantic relationships
- Group communication
- The language of mental health
- Language and emotion
- Communication and deception
- Body language
5. Module structure

The module will be delivered over a three week period. There will be six two hour blocks (four hours per week).

It is expected that students will also spend 38 study hours outside of the classroom contact hours on activities including assigned reading, optional reading of areas of personal interest, homework tasks, web research, and preparation for assessment.

Assessments will evaluate knowledge and understanding across a range of subject areas (multiple choice exam) together with more in-depth understanding and development (written essay / reflection).

6. Teaching methods

Teaching activities will include:

- Taught sessions
- Online learning
- Student preparation
- Small group working
- Group discussions

7. Assessment:

Assessment will be by:

- Multiple Choice Test with 20 questions (worth 50% of the overall mark)
- Written Essay / Reflection of 750-850 words (worth 50% of the overall mark)

8. Course structure:

The indicative schedule is as follows:

**Session One: Communication in Romantic Relationships**

This session will highlight the importance of communication for the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. We will consider the disclosure of personal information, partner responsiveness, and disengagement together with the impact of negative disclosure on relationship outcomes and the role of forgiveness. Therapeutic techniques to support those experiencing relationship conflict will be included. The session will examine the individual differences which influence the way in which we process and interpret information. A variety of contexts (e.g., long distance relationships) will be addressed.

**Session Two: Language and Emotion**

Although the prevalent position is that the experience of emotion has little to do with the language we use to express it, there is evidence indicating that language is actually a fundamental element in both the perception and experience of emotion. Language plays a role in emotion because language supports the conceptual knowledge used to make meaning of sensations from the body and world in a given context. Most people have a
compulsion to share their emotions and to be able to do so they must know and label them some way. In order to do so, specific words, concepts, categories, and narratives are used to understand and convey our emotional experiences to others. Questions we will consider include: If you don’t have the words can you experience the emotion? Do members of one culture who have many more words for a certain kind of emotion have experiences that are somehow different? How does bilingualism affect the way the think and react to events?

**Session Three:**  
*Communication and Deception*  
This course will begin by examining the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication for lie detection, a subject of interest for both specialist subject areas (e.g. legal contexts) and everyday life. The session will provide an insight into psychological deception research deception, including some of the most prominent current theories. We will explore common misconceptions in lie detection, high versus low stakes lies, and non-verbal (e.g., micro-expressions) and verbal indicators of lies. The teaching format is interactive, and much of the focus will be on discussing high stakes lies in the form of appeals for finding a missing person.

**Session Four:**  
*The Language of Mental Health*  
Language can shape how we see and think about the world, each other, and ourselves; this is of particular importance in the context of mental health. When an individual experiences mental health difficulties they may begin to think about what this experience means for them now and in the future. Their thoughts are shaped by the people they have come into contact with and those they are likely to meet in the future, particularly the way these individuals talk or have talked about mental health. This session will focus on exploring the language we use when talking about mental health. We will begin by looking at how mental health professionals talk about mental health difficulties, before moving on to explore the language we as the general public use when talking about those with mental health experiences. Finally, we will look at the impact this has on how those with mental health difficulties communicate their experiences and what these experiences mean for them.

**Session Five:**  
*Group Communication*  
This session will cover communication both within and between groups – between leaders and followers, relations between group members and improving relations between groups. Specific topics will include: how people are socialized into groups, the role of ritual and initiation ceremonies, group norms and what happens to those who break them, the impact of status and power and how to improve relations between groups, even those with a long history of violence. The sessions will involve group discussions based on real world topics and examples.

**Session Six**  
*Body Language*  
The final session will focus on the neurocognitive mechanisms behind the expression and perception of nonverbal cues (i.e., physical cues, such as phenotypic traits, and dynamic cues, such as faces and bodies in motion). Students will analyse the mechanisms behind action performance (i.e., how our intentions are reflected in our movements and gestures) and action perception (i.e., how our brain encodes and decodes nonverbal cues and drives appropriate responses to them). Sessions will include consideration of relevant theory and discussion of contemporary issues. We will
put this knowledge into practice, by applying techniques taken from drama practice. By the end of the session we will have gained awareness of the practical and theoretical implications that knowledge of nonverbal mechanisms can have in improving our ability to understand others, and at the same time raise awareness of our own communicative capacities.

9. Learning outcomes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcome</th>
<th>Assessment component which assesses this learning outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research and theory in the psychology of communication</td>
<td>Multiple Choice Test Paper</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Written Essay / Reflection</td>
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<td>Students will be able to research a topic within the subject area, be better able to work collaboratively in this research and to produce a piece of work based on that research</td>
<td>Written Essay / Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will be able to develop confidence in understanding and communicating complex ideas in written language</td>
<td>Multiple Choice Test Paper</td>
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10. Skills

Key skills that will be developed:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>How this skill is developed</th>
<th>Mode of assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Group discussions, activities and tasks in class</td>
<td>Written Essay / Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Group discussions, activities and tasks in class, collaborative research</td>
<td>Written Essay / Reflection</td>
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11. Books, ebooks and websites:

The University Website at [www.liv.ac.uk/library](http://www.liv.ac.uk/library) provides access to many relevant books and
electronic books, as well as academic journals and databases.

**Example pre-course reading**


**Reading lists will be provided for each session**

**Example material:**


