

INTRODUCTION

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OUR VISION

The field of communication studies is arguably one of the most exciting disciplines to study. Many students agree with this assertion as communication is one of the 10 most popular majors in college (Kramer, 2010). And many employers agree that this major equips students with a variety of competencies that are valued in the workplace including interpersonal skills, organizational skills, presentational skills, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, reasoning, and cultural awareness (Bertelsen & Goodboy, 2009). With research topics ranging from understanding relational maintenance and dating, to learning about nonverbal deception and lying, to persuading healthcare consumers to live better lives, communication research has produced findings that may profoundly enhance our daily lives if we understand them. This textbook is designed to help you as a student, understand some important communication research findings published in our peer-reviewed journals. As Kramer (2010) noted, “unless we believe that students do not learn anything from our classes, then our research makes a difference in their personal and professional lives” (p. 435). We want to make a difference in your life with information you are likely to care about, because we, like many other scholars, believe communication scholarship does make a difference in helping people become more effective communicators (Hummert, 2009).

This edited volume is unique because no other introductory book has attempted to translate entire research programs of complicated findings into simple real life practices across the major communication contexts. Most introductory texts are written for the “basic course”, which typically focuses on public speaking, group communication, and interpersonal communication. However, as the editors of this volume, it is our contention that the field has so much more to offer students beyond the basic course. We want to offer students “translational research” findings. As Frey (2009) noted, “because of its perceived lack of relevance and accessibility, to make a difference, scholarship typically has to be *translated* for use by other audiences” (p. 267). Petronio (1999) explained that “translating means that we take the knowledge discovered through research or theory and interpret it for everyday use. Translators develop pathways for converting research knowledge into practice” (p. 88). This book does precisely that; it translates some of the best research findings into practice so you can be an effective communicator in a variety of real life situations and contexts.

We believe that students who are introduced to our field for the first time should leave their introductory course with practical knowledge they can actually use in their daily lives. This perspective is rooted in the tradition of applied communication research. According to Wood (2000), applied communication scholarship adopts a particularly pragmatic focus by insisting on “putting theory and research into the service of practice and, equally, of studying practices to refine theory in order to gain new understandings of how communication functions and how it might function differently, or better” (p. 189). Therefore, this book provides real research findings from published studies that have practical implications, if not direct advice on how to communicate more appropriately and effectively. We do not believe that an introduction to our field should expose students to the hybrid/basic course (although we believe that public speaking, small group communication, and interpersonal communication are still important courses that should be taught separately). Since we know how fun and exciting the field is, we believe that students should be exposed to actual research findings that are directly relevant to them.

We are very fortunate to publish 44 brief mini-chapters that highlight major programs of communication research. And we are even more fortunate to feature chapters from the most published and prolific communication researchers in the field. Literally, every chapter in this book is written by the most *famous* experts who are noteworthy scholars with impressive research agendas. We are proud to say that we have the “all-star team” of communication researchers writing and translating in this book. These scholars have the biggest names in our field and it is an honor to feature their work in one edited volume. No other textbook has such impressive scholars and applied findings for an introductory course. It is our hope, that more universities will adopt our approach of exposing undergraduate students to translational research in the introductory course to orient them with the field, instead of relying on the basic course. Such an approach will leave students with better “take-aways” from an introductory course, show students a good cross-section of the state of the art research that is being conducted, allow students to recognize major programs of research and the prolific scholars who do this research, and ultimately give students practical real life advice grounded in scholarship. For additional information about these ideas, we asked Dr. Sandra Petronio, who was cited earlier in this introduction, to offer a brief history of translational research in the field for those of you who are interested in the origins of the translational movement. This brief history is offered next.

We know that translational communication scholarship can make a difference in your lives if you apply the principles and findings featured in this book. It is also our hope that you enjoy what you learn from this book and find this translational research to be helpful advice that can aid you in the meaningful practice of communication in life.

Cheers!

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