

**Spirituality and Communication**  
**COM4930 (23922): Special Topics**  
**Section: DC04**  
**Fall 2024**  
**Class Dates: 8/22/2024-12/04/2024**  
**MWF, Period 4: 10:40 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**  
**Room: 207 Rolfs Hall**

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## TOPIC OVERVIEW

Spirituality has received growing attention in the academic community. Law schools, business programs, and medical schools are integrating spirituality into their training in a response to an increasingly fast-paced society where citizens are more alienated from each other than in the past. With the emergence of spirituality into mainstream society and academia, there has been an effort to define universal themes of spirituality that can be used to communicate across disciplines. Thus, in this class, we will work from a universal definition of spirituality that transcends institutional religions, and **emphasizes connectedness and a sense of purpose in life**. It might be demonstrated by personal traits such as wisdom, love, creativity, mindfulness, transcendence, hope, resilience, and compassion.

The field of Communication offers a **context** for examining how spirituality can shape communication, as well as how people communicate about spirituality. Using principles about language, we can ask such questions as: “What kind of language do people use to articulate this dimension of their lives?” Or “How does the language people are using shape where their attention is focused?” Using principles about systems, we can also inquire, “How do spiritual themes present in systems impact individuals, and vice-versa?” Or using intrapersonal communication theories, we can ask, “What role does spirituality play in one’s life?” And “How does that impact our perceptions and communication with others?” Thus, using communication theory as our guide, we will explore the topic of **spirituality and communication**.

A sizable portion of this course is **discussion-based**. It is important to note that the term ‘spirituality’ carries with it a variety of connotation, some positive and some negative. Consequently, spirituality may bring up concerns of authoritarian approaches to convince people of certain ideas. **Nothing** in this course—including readings, assignments, and discussion of particular topics—is designed to persuade you that one particular religious or spiritual belief system is the ‘right’ one, or that you should adopt certain values or beliefs. I appreciate your assistance in creating a learning

environment that respects differences, and values the unique contributions of each person. We shall begin each class session with a quiet period.

## OBJECTIVES

1. **Examine** current trends in society concerning spirituality that are aimed at improving communication nationally and globally.
  2. **Explore** how the definitions and perceptions of spirituality shape communication and research.
  3. **Develop** an awareness of how spirituality influences communication in relationships and systems.
  4. **Expand** our sense of mindfulness about moment-to-moment communication.
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## REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Lesser, Elizabeth. *The Seeker's Guide (previously published as The New American Spirituality)*. Villard Books-Random House NY, 1999.
2. Remen, Rachel Naomi. *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2006.
3. Gonzales, Robert. *The Spirituality of Nonviolent Communication: A Course in Living Compassion*. Ruth Joy, 2022.

*Other readings will be provided as needed.*

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## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### I. Weekly Reflection Notes – Worth 3 points per week

This will be an ongoing discussion online to encourage mindful awareness outside of class. In these weekly discussions, you are required to make **three posts** on Canvas. **First**, you are required to write about the materials and class discussion content for that week. You can also write about an observation regarding something we covered in class as you notice it in other people or events around you.

**For the second and third posts**, you are required to give comments to two other classmates. Remember, the discussion needs to be intellectual and academic in nature. Further, it must be done respectfully regardless of your position regarding a particular issue. This weekly online activity allows students to engage more actively with the readings/lectures and engage with each other in a constructive way in addition to classroom time.

Your first three posts are due on Sunday the first week of class. You can make one post introducing yourself, one post sharing your goals for this class, and the third regarding your thoughts on spirituality. This will serve as a baseline for you. If there are no readings assigned to any week in the schedule of topics, you should just post about topics from the prior week's class and how you see it in your life or in others' lives as you navigate your week.

**Quality of Posts (IMPORTANT):** Your posts should demonstrate that you are reading the weekly comments and that you are reading the assigned materials. Since this is a 4000-level course, students should make a point of synthesizing material. Please make your posts in the spirit of academic inquiry.

## **II. Reflection Papers – Worth 100 Points Each**

You are required to write **3 reflection papers** (3-4 pages excluding the bibliography page) regarding any of the materials (books, articles, lectures) at different points throughout the semester.

**Reflective writing is an opportunity to sort through learning and experience.** Students are expected to cite at least three quotations from the materials covered that particular week. Students do not need to do outside research for the reflection papers. In addition, students will author the papers either in APA, MLA, or The Chicago Manual of Style. **Whatever style you use, I require you to be consistent throughout this course.**

## **III. Quizzes – Worth 10 points each**

You will be presented with **five quizzes** throughout the semester to assess your learning.

## **IV Final Project – Worth 100 Points**

For the final project, you have several options. These are:

a. **Affirmation Journal** – This is a creative journal (at least 8x11) filled with 25 (One-sided) pages that communicate the meaning of spirituality to you. This journal should inspire you when you look at it. Many people create a collage on some pages, and fill others with images, lyrics from songs, printouts of inspirational e-mail, stories or poems, or your favorite proverbs. You might include pictures or quotes from role models that you have or aspire to be like. Or you can tear out pictures from magazines of scenery or places you would like to visit or see. Feel free to use your own work: Poetry, painting, etc. **However, this is not scrapbook of your past.** It is called an affirmation journal, because it should provide an image that motivates you **for the future**. If you are thinking you are not artistic, it does not matter. Some people diligently cut up pictures and pair them with clever quotes. Others tear and paste. Grading will be based upon effort at variety, expression of your individual personality, and presentation (Is it neat/professional).

b. **Career Journal** – This is a collection of 25 different dream jobs that you would love to do. You will print out the front page of a website describing the job and put them into a folder. You do not need to write or review anything here. Note: They are not ‘job openings’ but information about things people are doing that you think is exciting. Someone once found a Zen underwater photographer, another a photographer for National Geographic, another leading bike tours across Europe. Our careers contribute to our identity and our sense of meaning and purpose in the world. Too often, people settle for a ‘traditional’ path and go through the motions of pursuing their career on autopilot. People who love their work often say they would do it even if they were not getting paid. Your jobs do not have to be related to your major at all.

### **c. Paper on Spirituality Research**

In order to increase your awareness of the scientific research on spirituality, you will write a summary of **five empirically driven** (quantitative or qualitative) articles in an area of your choice. The objective is to search for studies on spirituality that will inform you as a future professional about how to incorporate spirituality into your work. Include a full bibliography at the end of your paper (MLA, APA, or The Chicago Manual of Style). Helpful keywords to help you locate

spiritually-related articles include, but not limited to: Creativity, intuition, death/near-death, art/play therapy, non-traditional/alternative, holistic, love, adventure therapy, experiential, eastern, spirit, spirituality, non-dualistic, spiritual issues, transcendence, purpose and meaning, homeopathy, ancient wisdom, natural healing, organic. You could include religion (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, or others) if it fits your purposes.

**Note: It is important for you to select articles directly distinguishing spirituality from purely psychological topics.** You can find the term directly—even if it takes other words to get at it.

It is ideal for you to select articles that are related. For instance, if you are interested in law, you might choose articles about lawyers and spirituality. Other topics could be health and spirituality, wellness and spirituality, journalism and spirituality, etc. If you are feeling uncertain about your career path, you can explore several different areas (e.g., ½ marketing and ½ sociology). If you are having trouble finding articles, consult a reference librarian either online or in-person. They are incredibly helpful. However, it is best to get an early start. This is a challenging effort, and the closer you get to the deadline, the more difficult it will seem.

#### **d. Final Paper**

You can synthesize all the things you have done in the three reflection papers (including things you have written in the discussion board) and basically ask yourself, “What does this all mean to me?”, “How does my understanding of spirituality and communication have evolved during this semester?”, “What have I learned?” Note: For this option, you are required to cite 4-6 sources. Since this final paper serves as a comprehensive reflection paper, you are expected to use a mix of materials already presented in class as well as some outside research. Also note that simply cutting and pasting all three reflection papers into one giant paper is unacceptable and will be considered self-plagiarism. You may use those papers to jumpstart critical thought, but not to simply regurgitate things you have already mentioned in the three response papers.

Again, students will author the papers either in APA, MLA, or The Chicago Manual of Style.

**Whatever style you use, I require you to be consistent throughout.**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Any plagiarized work will result in a score of zero for the assignment, and possibly an “F” for the course.

#### **ATTENDANCE**

Due to the experiential nature of this class, your active and thoughtful participation during group discussions (whether in class or in the weekly comments section) is essential to an effective and meaningful learning experience. You can have three absences for any reason. Beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup> absence, you will lose 20 points per absence off of your final grade. To get an ‘excused’ absence, you need to provide documentation of an emergency, and notice to your instructor *prior* to the absence. Three tardiness (over 7 minutes) will equal one absence. Leaving class for more than 5-7 minutes will count as one tardy. To be counted present, you must be in class at least 40 minutes of each hour of class. Feel free to bring sweatshirts, pillows, or towels to class to increase comfort during relaxation activities.

An **excused absence is possible** with a note from a clinic or doctor, a letter notification for a career interview, or a notification from the Athletic department.

Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>) and require appropriate documentation.

I will take attendance in each class. If a student is quarantined due to COVID-19, the student must contact me and provide documentation. If several students in class are absent due to COVID-19, I may choose to record lectures and provide access to those quarantined students.

## POINTS

Assignments	Points
Weekly Reflection Notes (10 reflection notes worth 3 points each)	30
Reflection Paper 1	100
Reflection Paper 2	100
Reflection Paper 3	100
Quizzes (5 Quizzes)	50
Final Project	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>480 points</b>

## ASSIGNMENT LETTER GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

A/- = Excellent. In addition to excellent quality and performance, work that earns an “A” exceeds minimum requirements and expectations.

B+/- = Very good. A grade of “B” indicates successful completion of all assignment requirements with little room for improvement. Please note that all minimum requirements must be satisfactorily completed to earn a grade of “B” or better. Writing skills and overall performance are above average.

C+/- = Good. A grade of “C” is the most commonly earned grade on course assignments. It indicates work in good standing. All minimum requirements are met, although some might need improvement. Writing skills are average to excellent.

D = Passing but below average. The assignment’s minimum requirements are not met and/or quality of work is less than average.

E = Not passing. Minimum requirements are not met and quality of work is poor, or work displays plagiarism.

## FINAL GRADES

Below is the percentage and point breakdown for each letter grade. Please be advised that final letter grades are determined by the number of points earned.

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	94.0 – 100 %
A-	90.0 – 93.99 %
B+	87.0 – 89.99 %
B	84.0 – 86.99 %
B-	80.0 – 83.99 %
C+	77.0 – 79.99 %
C	73.0 – 76.99 %
C-	70.0 – 72.99 %
D+	67.0 – 69.99 %
D	62.0 – 66.99 %
D-	60.0 – 61.99 %
E	0 – 59.99 %

## LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late work is either points deducted or rejected. **All assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. EST (before midnight) the latest.** It is imperative that students plan ahead. It is the student's responsibility to be certain that their computer is compatible with Canvas. In the event of an extreme emergency that will prevent a student from participating in class for an extended period of time (e.g., hospitalization), please notify me as soon as possible to discuss options for a grade of Incomplete (for more about grades of Incomplete, see notes under "Final Grades").

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

All submitted work during the course, written or oral, will be the student's **personal, original work, and properly cited.** If a student violates this rule, evaluations of work will be done accordingly. Further, if necessary, adjudication will be processed by procedures approved by the University of Florida Honor Court.

## STUDENT CONDUCT

The William & Grace Dial Center for Speech and Communication strives for a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. Students are expected to behave according to the UF student code of conduct in their classes. This means treating their instructors and fellow classmates with respect. To ensure a positive learning environment, students should not: Make complaints publicly (in front of other students); attack the instructor verbally, physically, or in written form; or express reactions in the classroom that would bring harm to other students.

Failure to meet the UF code of conduct can impact a student's class participation grade or result in referral to the UF judicial office. Class atmosphere can be made or broken by the approach that students take to the challenges of the course. Students that support others, show good humor in the face of obstacles, show dedication in the face of setbacks, and show grace when others are not doing as well will help to create a positive communication climate.

In a communication class, it is especially important for everyone to:

1. Display respect for all members of the classroom—including the instructor and students.
2. Pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities.
3. Avoid racist, sexist, homophobic or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom.
4. Avoid unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g., having private conversations, surfing the internet, doing work for other classes, making/receiving cell phone calls, text messaging, etc.).

**U Matter, We Care:** Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The *U Matter, We Care* initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) so that the *U Matter, We Care* Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor are available by phone at 352-392-1575. The *U Matter, We Care* Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that **asking for help is a sign of strength**. In case of emergency, call 911.

## DISABILITY AND SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should contact me privately, as soon as possible, and discuss accommodations necessary to ensure a successful and educational experience. It is the student's responsibility both to notify me and to make the first contact with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Additionally, the student must provide written documentation from the DRC at least one week prior to the date in which the student is requesting accommodation.

Other resources are [available at https://disability.ufl.edu/](https://disability.ufl.edu/).

Counseling and Wellness resources:

- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

## RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) ensures that student records (for any students over 18 years of age) are kept confidential. I will not release a student's grade to anyone other than the student, or school officials who are given permission to view the student's progress.

Anyone other than student (or an approved school official) may not request any information (beyond simple directory information) about a student, their progress, or their status as a student in my class—this includes parents, partners, and other students. For more information, see the University of Florida website for The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

### **ACCEPTABLE USE OF COMPUTER SYSTEM**

As a student in this class, you are subject to the Acceptable Use Policies for UF's computer systems. Anyone violating these policies will receive an automatic grade of "E" for the course and will be referred to the University for Disciplinary Action as deemed appropriate by the University of Florida Honor Court.

### **CHANGES TO COURSE SYLLABUS/CALENDAR**

I reserve the right to update or change portions of this course syllabus and calendar in order to make the class a better experience for everyone. This may be in response to suggestions from students, from my own observations, or as the result of requirements by the Department, College, or University. Changes will be posted to the course site on Canvas, and also communicated in class.

### **COURSE FEEDBACK**

I welcome feedback about the course. Students are free to share their thoughts with me in an open, polite, and constructive manner during the semester. Students can make suggestions to me privately during office hours, or via email.

### **OFFICIAL COURSE EVALUATION**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### **QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, COURSE PROBLEMS**

If a student has any concern regarding the course, contact me immediately. However, please do NOT contact me for computer, internet and/or Canvas-related problems. Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-HELP [4357], or email to [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu) for these matters.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality and anonymity are an expectation of this course. The information that you read in the weekly comments or hear in class can be personal and **it is expected that you will respect the privacy of your classmates, instructor, and guest speaker/s**. Please realize that there is also no way to fully guarantee confidentiality, so use discretion with your posts. Find your own balance with your own levels of disclosure comfort. If you want to discuss further with me, please let me know.



## **REFERRALS**

Due to the nature of this class, it will tend to involve many personal discussions. Please note that this is an academic setting, and some issues would be outside the scope of this class and more appropriate for a counseling setting. Along that same line, if at any point, something from discussion presents an ongoing concern for you, please see me.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS FALL 2024

DATE	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
1. Aug 22-30	<p><b>Introduction to the Course: Why Spirituality and Communication?</b></p> <p>-Getting to Know You</p> <p>-Discuss the Syllabus</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Fuertes, Al, and Kelley Dugan. 2021. Spirituality through the lens of students in higher education. <i>Religions</i> 12, (11): 924, <a href="https://login.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/spirituality-through-lens-students-higher/docview/2602171809/se-2">https://login.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/spirituality-through-lens-students-higher/docview/2602171809/se-2</a></p> <p>Chapter 1 and 2 Elizabeth Leser book</p>	Weekly Comments 1 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
2. Sep 2-6	<p><b>Humanizing Spirituality</b></p> <p>Sep 2 holiday</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Chapter 1 and 2 Kitchen Table Wisdom book Chapter 3 and 4 Elizabeth Leser book</p> <p>Quiz 1 on Friday</p>	Weekly Comments 2 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
3. Sep 9-13	<p><b>Non-Violent Communication and Spirituality</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Chapter 1 and 2 NVC Book</p>	Weekly Comments 3 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
4. Sep 16-20	<p><b>Stress and Mindfulness</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Chapter 7 and 8 Lesser Book</p> <p>Quiz 2 on Friday</p>	Weekly Comments 4 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
5. Sep 23-27	<p><b>Opening the Heart and Embracing Life</b></p> <p>Chapter 5 and 6 Kitchen Table Wisdom</p>	Reflection Paper #1 Due Friday of this Week

		Weekly Comments Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
6. Sep 30- Oct 4	<b>Authenticity and Presence of Mind</b>  Chapter 3 and 4 NVC Book  Quiz 3 on Friday	Weekly Comments 5 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
7. Oct 7-11	<b>Heartfulness</b>  Readings:  Chapter 9 and 10 Lesser Book	Weekly Comments 6 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
8. Oct 14- 18	<b>Consecrating the Ordinary</b>  Readings:  Chapter XIII and IX Kitchen Table Wisdom  Chapter 13 Lesser Book  Quiz 4 on Friday	Weekly Comments 7 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m..
9. Oct 21- 25	<b>Impermanence and Gratitude</b>  Readings:  Chapter 5 and 6 NVC Book	Weekly Comments 8 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
10. Oct 28- Nov 1	<b>The Landscape of the Soul</b>  Readings:  Chapter 14 and 15 Lesser Book	<b>Reflection Paper #2 Due Friday of this Week</b>
11. Nov 4-8	<b>The Dyad Meditation Process</b>  Readings:  Chapter 7 and Afterword NVC Book	Weekly Comments 9 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.
12. Nov 11- 15	<b>November 11 Holiday</b>  <b>Soulfulness Toolbox</b>  Readings:  Chapter 16 Lesser Book	Weekly Comments 10 Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m.

	Quiz 5 on Friday	
13. Nov 18-22	<b>Embracing Life</b> Kitchen Table Wisdom Chapter VI	Weekly Comments Due on Sunday 11:59 p.m. <b>Reflection Paper #3 Due Friday of this Week</b>
14. Nov 25-29	<b>Holiday Week</b>	-
15. Dec 2-4	<b>December 5 and 6: Reading Days</b>  Final Project Due December 7  Final Discussion	<b>Final Project Due December 7</b>