

SCOM318: Persuasive Message Design Utilizing Death Awareness
Harrison 112, TR 2:00pm – 3:15pm
Spring Semester

Course Instructor:

Dr. Lindsey A. Harvell
1292 Harrison
Office Hours: TR 12:30pm – 1:30pm and by appointment
harve2La@jmu.edu

Textbook:

Greenberg, J., Koole, S.L., & Pyszczynski, T. (2004). *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Harvell, L.A. & Nisbett, G.S. (2016). *Denying Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Terror Management Theory*. London: Routledge. (Available online from Dr. Harvell)

Various online articles posted on Canvas

Course Objectives:

This course will introduce the role of death awareness as a persuasive message design technique. Students will learn the role death anxiety plays in our everyday lives and how it relates to larger psychological and communication issues. Additionally, this course will examine the empirical research generated by Terror Management Theory over the past 20 years, drawing from over 300 studies conducted in a dozen countries around the world. We will address a wide range of human social phenomena, fundamentally tied to communication, interpersonal attachment, sexuality and attraction, physical health, risk taking, creativity, needs for structure and meaning, unconscious cognition, group identification, political preferences, prejudice, disgust, aggression, stereotyping, religion, and martyrdom. The semester will culminate in students creating an advocacy message using existential awareness as their main persuasive tool.

Policies:

This course is subject to university policies on honor code violations. See the undergraduate handbook for the explanations of these policies. Violating the honor code is a serious offense; I would just steer clear of that life choice.

- Any individual observed copying answers from another individual on exams will meet the criteria for violating the honor code.
- If you have questions regarding what comprises academic misconduct, plagiarism, and/or a violation of the honor code please contact me. Ignorance of the definition of plagiarism, academic misconduct, and/or violating the honor code is not a valid excuse and will not keep you from being charged.

Add/Drop Policy:

Please visit the following website for information on adding and dropping courses:

<http://www.jmu.edu/syllabus/>

Attendance:

Attendance is expected. Not attending will undoubtedly cause you extreme sorrow, whether it is from your grade or from the absence of information that week. Coming to class is a good life choice.

Since speaker-audience skills are mutually dependent, your attendance on presentation days are vital. Every student is expected to be in attendance on presentation days. Participating as an audience member for this class is just as important as presenting the speech. If you miss a speech day – whether or not you are scheduled to speak – you will automatically lose 10 points (for each absence) from your final point total. If you are tardy on a presentation day, **DO NOT ENTER** the classroom if another student is speaking. Wait until they have finished speaking and then enter quietly.

College of Arts and Letters First-Week Attendance Policy:

At the instructor's discretion, any student registered for a class in the College of Arts and Letters who does not attend the first two (2) scheduled meetings of the class (or does not attend the first scheduled meeting of a class that meets once a week) may be administratively dropped from the class. Students dropped for non-attendance will be notified via e-mail by the Association Dean of the College. Students who fail to attend the first two meetings of a class for which they are registered but who do not receive an e-mail notification have not been administratively dropped by their instructor. Unless those students drop the course on their own, they will receive a grade at the end of the semester. All students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their schedules and changes made in their schedule via e-mail and through the web. There are **NO OVERRIDES** available for any introductory SCOM courses.

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:

Students are required to notify the faculty in writing by no later than the end of the Drop-Add period the first week of the semester of potential scheduled absences due to participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity and determine with the faculty if mutually acceptable alternative methods exist for completing the missed activities or if the student should drop the course. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.

Exam Make-Up Policy:

No make-up exams are given unless a verifiable emergency is present and then only at the instructor's discretion. In such a case, you must contact the instructor **BEFORE** the exam by

email. Once an exam's answers have been returned, no make-up is allowed. Requests for regarding particular items will only be considered within one week after the exam or class assignment is returned to class.

Notes and Technology:

Notes will not be available from the instructor. You are responsible for obtaining those from classmates, so don't make anybody angry and make friends.

Cell phones and pagers must be off and placed in a backpack or purse during class. Cell phones or pagers may not be left out on a desk. **LAPTOPS, TABLETS ... REALLY ANY TECHNOLOGY ... ARE NOT ALLOWED IN CLASS.** For years, the scholars of whom you model yourselves after and read about lived without technology. Therefore, because they turned out so well (including myself), I want to give you the exact same academic beginning. Turn 'em off.

Rules and Guidelines for Written Assignments:

All papers must be typed, stapled, double-spaced, printed on one side of the page only, have one-inch margins, and use 12-point Times New Roman font. Papers should not be placed in folders or report covers. All papers should be carefully proofread for spelling and grammatical errors before being submitted, and should be formatted according to APA style, including in-text citations and end citations on a reference page. Papers will not be accepted without staples. Guidelines for paper length are estimates of what is required to address fully the elements of the assignment – concise, well-argued papers are better than long, disorganized ones, but page length in itself will not affect the paper grade.

Disability Accommodations:

JMU abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, which mandate reasonable accommodations be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability and may require some kind of instructional and/or exam accommodations, please contact me early in the semester so I can provide or facilitate provision of accommodations you may need. If you have not already done so, you will need to register with the Office of Disability Services, the designated office on campus to provide services for students with disabilities. The office is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 1201 (phone: 540-568-6705). Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

Religious Observance:

All faculty are required to give reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students requesting them on grounds of religious observation. The faculty member determines what accommodations are appropriate for his/her course. Students should notify the faculty by no later than the end of the first week of the semester of potential scheduled absences and determine with the instructor if mutually acceptable alternative methods exist for completing the missed

classroom time, lab, or activity. Contact the Office of Equal Opportunity at 540-568-6991 if you have additional questions.

Assignment Due Dates:

All assignments, papers, presentations, and exams must be completed on the date assigned. If you turn in an assignment late or do not come to class on exam day, you will receive a **zero** for the assignment. No late work will be accepted. You must turn papers in class – do not put papers under my door or email papers. All work must be submitted on paper; no work will be accepted by email.

Inclement Weather Policy:

This course follows JMU's inclement weather policy (see: <http://www.jmu.edu/JMUpolicy/1309.shtml>). James Madison University is primarily a self-contained campus with a large number of residential students requiring a variety of support services, regardless of inclement weather conditions or emergency situations. For the safety and well-being of its students and employees, the university may close or limit its services based on inclement weather or other emergencies. Refer to the following sources for information on closings or delays:

- JMU Weather Line: 540-433-5300
- JMU radio station: 1610 AM
- JMU's home page: www.jmu.edu
- Area radio and television stations
- JMU Office of Public Safety, who in turn is responsible for announcements on the Emergency Notification System

Communication Center:

For assistance with your presentation, consider using the JMU Communication Center. They are located in the Student Success Center, on the first floor in 1155. Their peer tutors can work with you to prepare or rehearse your project. Think of them as your first audience, providing qualified feedback that helps you refine your ideas, increase your confidence, and improve your delivery. The Communication Center has practice rooms, projectors, and recording equipment that allows you to evaluate your progress in a simulated classroom environment. Visit their website (www.jmu.edu/commcenter) to make an appointment or utilize their resources. I strongly recommend you do a final rehearsal with the Communication Center.

Assignments:

Participation: You will receive participation credit for **worthwhile contributions** to class discussions. The instructor reserves the right to deem a comment as worthwhile or not.

Exams: There will be two essay exams over the material discussed in class as well as the readings. No study guides will be provided.

Guided Discussions: For the first 45 minutes of select classes, one student will guide the discussion with his/her discussion questions and/or activities. Each student will complete this once during the semester.

Paper: You will write a paper addressing an issue of interest concerning an aspect of social cognition and/or human behavior as it relates to terror management processes and communication. The topic for this assignment may come from the Greenberg et al. or the Harvell & Nisbett texts, or any of the readings or any other source. The paper will (a) summarize current literature relevant to the issue; (b) feature and explicate a TMT perspective applicable to the topic; and (c) review (or suggest) relevant empirical research. This paper should be 15-20 pages of text and follow APA 6th edition format. You will first submit a short proposal introducing the topic you wish to address and some potential sources. Once the proposal has been accepted, work may begin on the paper. All work must be original.

Final Project: At the end of the semester, during the final exam time, you will present an advocacy message using existential awareness as your main persuasive tool. More details will be provided later in the semester.

Course Requirements and Grading Scale:

Participation	50 points
Exam 1	100 points
Exam 2	100 points
Guided Discussion	150 points
Paper	200 points
Final Project	400 points
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Total	1000 points

**The syllabus is subject to change due to possible modifications in the course.

Course Schedule & Readings:

Psychological Introduction to Terror Management Theory and Methods

Jan. 12th – Introduction to Course

- Syllabus review
- The concept of death

Jan. 14th – *Flight From Death: A Quest for Immortality (in class)*

Jan. 19th – Existential Awareness – Introduction

- *Flight From Death: A Quest for Immortality (in class)*
- Read Online Chapter - Ernest Becker, *Denial of Death*

Jan. 21st – Experimental Design Methods

- Overview of experimental design methods
- Read Online Chapter – *Experimental Methods*
- Read Online Chapter – *Reading Research Reports*
- **PAPER PROPOSAL DUE**

Jan. 26th – TMT Methodology

- Harvell, Stillman, Nisbett, Schow, & Cranney (2016)
- Harvell text, Chapter 7 – Semmler
- Harvell text, Chapter 9 – McGlone & Merola
- Burke, Martens, & Faucher (2010)

Jan. 28th – Introduction to TMT

- Greenberg et al. text, Chapters 1 and 3
- Harvell text, Chapter 1 – Darrell and Pyszczynski
- Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon (1989)

Feb. 2nd - Psychology of terror management defenses – close relationships, self-esteem, CWV, and social death

- Greenberg et al. text, Chapter 4
- Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger (2003) – close relationships
- Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon (1986) – self-esteem
- Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski (1998) – cultural worldviews

Feb. 4th – Religion as a terror management defense

- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 9
- Harvell (2016) – Social isolation amongst the religiously affiliated
- Harvell (2016) – Exploring the confluence between religious affiliation and political decision-making of voters

Feb. 9th – **No Class – Assessment Day!** ☺

Feb. 11th – **Exam 1 – Theory and Methods**

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Terror Management Theory

Feb. 16th – Terror Management Health Model (TMHM)

- Goldenberg & Arndt (2008) – The TMHM introduced
- Harvell text, Chapter 4 – Spina, Arndt, Boyd, & Goldenberg
- Cooper, Goldenberg, & Arndt (2011) – breast exams

Feb. 18th – Marketing and Money

- Harvell text – Chapter 6 – Stillman & Harvell
- Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon (2004) – Urge to splurge
- Harvell, Stillman, Nisbett, Schow, & Cranney (2016) – Las Vegas Airport Consumerism Study

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Feb. 23rd – Crime and Law

- Harvell text – Chapter 5 – Heen, Lieberman, & Arndt
- Arndt, Lieberman, Cook, & Solomon (2005) – legal decision making
- Lieberman, Shoemaker, & Krauss (2014) – death penalty decisions

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Feb. 25th – Political Attitudes

- Harvell text – Chapter 3 – Kosloff, Landau, & Burke
- Burke, Kosloff, & Landau (2013) – meta-analysis – Political Attitudes
- Harvell (2012) – politics, emotions, and death

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 1st – Terrorism

- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 16
- Harvell text – Chapter 13 – Rodriguez, Avtgis, & Liberman
- Pyszczynski, Rothschild, & Abdollahi (2008) – Terrorism, violence, and hope for peace
- Kosloff, Landau, Weise, Sullivan, & Greenberg (2009) – 9/11 psychological repercussions

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 3rd - Gender Differences

- Harvell text – Chapter 11 – Passalacqua
- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 5
- Fritsche & Jonas (2005) – Gender conflicts and CWV

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 8th – **No Class – Spring Break!** ☺
Mar. 10th – **No Class – Spring Break!** ☺

Mar. 15th – Age

- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 7
- Bozo, Tunca, & Şimşek (2009) – Death anxiety, age, & health-promoting behaviors
- O'Connor & McFadden (2012) – Ageism and dementia

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 17th – Affect and Emotion

- Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, & de Grijjs (2004)
- Strachan, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon (2001)
- Dunkel (2009)

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 22nd – Moral Amplification and Us vs. Them

- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 20
- Hohman & Hogg (2015) – in-group identification
- Agroskin & Jonas (2013) – motivations behind group identification

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 24th – TMT and Popular Culture

- Harvell text – Chapter 7 – Semmler
- Discussion Question – How can we use this to our advantage when persuading?

Mar. 29th – TMT in Communication

- Harvell text – Chapter 2 – Nisbett & Harvell
- Miller & Landau (2005) – Communication and terrorism
- Harvell text – Chapter 9 – McGlone & Merola

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Mar. 31st – Fear Appeals

- Harvell text – Chapter 10 – Lancaster, Bowman, & Harvell
- Jessop & Wade (2008) – Fear appeals and binge drinking
- Lancaster, Bowman, & Harvell (2015) – Airline safety messages

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Apr. 5th – Cognition and Persuasion

- Arndt, Greenberg, & Cook (2002) – Cognitive architecture of TMT
- Greenberg, Arndt, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon (2001) – Death thought accessibility
- Routledge, Juhl, & Vess (2013) – Personal need for structure and death anxiety

Guest Discussion Leader _____

Apr. 7th – Intercultural TMT

- Harvell text – Chapter 15 – Park & Pyszczynski
- **Final Paper Rough Draft Due**

Apr. 12th – Review Day

- Discussion Question: What are key theoretical components that have risen from the interdisciplinary approaches of TMT?

Apr. 14th - **Exam 2 (Interdisciplinary approaches to TMT)**

Terror Management Theory and Persuasive Message Design

Apr. 19th – TMT Criticisms

- Greenberg et al text – Chapter 30
- Baron (1997)
- Discussion Question: What are some of your own criticisms of TMT? What works well? What doesn't?

Apr. 21st – Translating A Theory Into Application

- No reading assigned! ☺
- **Final Paper Due**

Apr. 21st – Building persuasive messages

- Nabi (2015) – Using emotion in persuasive messages
- Magee & Kalyanaraman (2009) – Worldview and mortality salience in persuasive processes
- Discussion Question: How do we use death awareness to our persuasive advantage?

Apr. 26th - Workshop – Building your advocacy messages

Apr. 28th – Work Day/Individual Status Meetings

Final Exam/Presentations: Tuesday May 3rd, 1:00pm – 3:00pm

SCOM 318: Terror Management Theory Context Paper

Research Project

Point Value: 200

Assignment Description: The purpose of this paper is for you to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a specific contextual area of Terror Management Theory (TMT). To do this, you will create a literature review examining an area of TMT of your choosing. This paper must include subheadings, and a coherent story of the extant research in the area of your choice. Failure to do this will result in a less than desirable grade. I will look at rough drafts *once*. These rough drafts must be sent to me no later than April 14th for review. This is not required, but *highly* suggested.

Specifically, this paper must:

- summarize current literature relevant to the issue
- feature and explicate a TMT perspective applicable to the topic
- review (or suggest) relevant empirical research
- make an argument for why this context is important when understanding how to use TMT in persuasive message design

Grading Criteria and Expectations: You are expected to produce a well thought-out and executed paper, conforming to the expectations and standards of a 300-level class.

- The paper should *clearly* address the major specified components listed above.
- The paper should be 15-20 pages in length (*not* including title and reference pages).
- A **minimum** of 20 *academic* sources should be used and cited in-text.
- Papers should follow APA 6th edition guidelines for formatting and references.
- Poor grammar, spelling, APA errors, and/or organization will result in a grade reduction.

Other Considerations and Helpful Hints:

- Summarize research on the theory.
- If you have questions about the paper, ask! I also look at rough drafts. I highly recommend doing that.
- Internet sources will **not** count as academic sources (this does not include journal articles from academic databases – treat those as print sources).
- If you are not familiar with 6th edition APA, you can find help from the writing center and online. Not knowing 6th edition APA guidelines is not an excuse for not using them.
- Website for the JMU Writing Center is <https://www.jmu.edu/uwc/>

Existential Advocacy Message Expectations

The goal of this exercise is to use all of your knowledge you have learned this semester in Terror Management Theory (TMT) and persuasion to build an advocacy message using existential awareness as your main persuasive tool. You may choose any type of advocacy message (health, politics, environmental, etc.). This application of the material will serve as your final exam. Here are some guidelines for your presentation to the class:

- The preference is for this project to be an edited video. However, if you choose to do story boards instead, the boards must be color and high quality photos and text.
- Your presentation is not just the unveiling of your video. Once the video is unveiled, you must break down the video and explain each of your decisions for including what you included. Every choice must have a reason.
- Your presentation must have a section on TMT, explaining explicitly what aspects of existential awareness you chose and a detailed analysis of the effects of your choices.
- Your presentation must include a section on advocacy. What are you advocating for? Who is your target audience? Where/when will this message be best received? What aspects of persuasion did you use when building this message?
- Make sure you cite relevant literature in your presentation.

**SCOM 442: Final Advocacy Message Project
Rubric**

Group Names:

Topic:

Modality:

Provides compelling introduction	A	B	C	D	F
Persuasive rationale for campaign/message is given	A	B	C	D	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what are you advocating for? - who is your target audience? - where/when will this message be best received? 					
Message modality quality	A	B	C	D	F
Aspects of the message are adequately explained	A	B	C	D	F
Persuasive techniques explained	A	B	C	D	F
Terror Management Theory is incorporated into message choices	A	B	C	D	F
Potential effects/roadblocks are discussed	A	B	C	D	F
Professional Presentation Style	A	B	C	D	F
Time (10-15 minutes)	A	B	C	D	F

General Comments: