

MMC 3203, Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications

Wednesdays, Periods 5 – 7 (11:45 AM – 2:45 PM)
Weimer G030

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Office Hours: Before class or by appointment

Catalog description: A cross-disciplinary introduction to ethics-relevant situations faced by media professionals. Topics include professional standards of conduct, audience representation and engagement and issues associated with the production, presentation and delivery of messages that reflect the best interests of audiences, clients and stakeholders.

What is right and what is wrong? In journalism, advertising, public relations, and telecommunication, mass communicators constantly encounter situations where they have to respond to that question. Sometimes, they even have to face issues where there are competing values or equally compelling options. Indeed, an ethical dilemma arises when a situation is not a matter of right versus wrong, but right versus right!

This course will help you to identify and analyze ethical issues and dilemmas in mass communication. We will work to develop skills to respond to ethical problems that you will likely encounter as a media practitioner.

Required Course Materials

Black, J., & Roberts, C. (2011). *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge

Supplemental materials will be added to the course website in Canvas.

Course Goals

Upon successful completion of the course, you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand key principles of media ethics
- ✓ Recognize ethical issues facing mass communicators today
- ✓ Apply analytical skills to solve ethical dilemmas
- ✓ Include the perspectives and values of diverse stakeholders on ethical reasoning
- ✓ Apply ethics standards to decision making across mass communication disciplines

Assignments

Expectations and assignments in this course include participation, group presentations, response papers, and one analysis paper. The nature of the assignments is reviewed briefly as follows:

- *Participation*: Classroom participation is required. You have to be prepared to contribute to the class discussions. Complete the reading assignment before class starts. Ask questions. Express your opinions. Respect others' perspectives. Students who demonstrate preparation and contribute in a significant way to ongoing discussions will get 10 points toward the final grade. Students who demonstrate infrequent involvement and contribute to the discussions on a moderate degree will get 7 points. Students who rarely contribute to class discussions will get 3 points. Finally, students who do not participate will get 0 points.
- *Group Presentations*: Students will present to the class case studies according to the topics that we will discuss during the semester. Each group will consist of 2 or 3 students and will be charged with presenting a 20-minute talk.
- *Response papers*: Three one- to two-page response papers will be required throughout the semester. These papers will help students to apply analytical reasoning to ethical problems faced by media professionals.
- *Analysis paper*: For the analysis paper, your assignment will be to identify a case in media ethics in which you would have acted differently than the media practitioner(s) at the center of it. The paper should be organized in a way that makes clear how you will answer the six major questions from *Doing Ethics in Media*:
 1. **What's your problem?** Briefly describe the case. (You may attach a published blog, article, case study, or news story as a link or as an appendix for background.) Spell out what makes this situation a moral dilemma. Leave yourself with a clearly stated question to be answered.
 2. **Why not follow the rules?** Are there some precedents, guidelines, codes, or laws you should keep in mind? If so, are there reasons your dilemma can't be resolved by them?

3. **Who wins, who loses?** Who are the stakeholders, and what impact is your decision likely to have on each of them in the short term and in the long term?
4. **What's it worth?** Prioritize your values—both moral and non-moral values—and decide which one(s) you won't compromise.
5. **Who's whispering in your ear?** In general—and specifically in this case—which school of philosophy or set of moral principles provides you with a moral compass?
6. **How's your decision going to look?** State your conclusion, and imagine what your friends and people you respect will think about your decision-making.

As a guideline for length, each section of the paper should be about 1-2 pages double-spaced, for a total length of about 6-12 pages.

Course Grading Scale

The student's overall course grade will be based on a cumulative point allocation of 100 points, which will be distributed as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Points</u>
• Participation	10
• Group Presentations (2)	30
• Response Papers (3)	30
• Analysis Paper	30
<u>Total</u>	<u>100</u>

Final grades for the course will be calculated per the following ranges:

A 90-100	C 70-76
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 80-86	D 60-66
C+ 77-79	E Below 60

University & Course Policies

Attendance

Although emergencies, illness (self or dependent others), and unforeseen circumstances cannot be anticipated in advance, I do encourage students to do all necessary to commit to reliable, on-time attendance every week. Students should be cautioned that one's record of attendance will have a direct impact on his/her participation grade.

Missed Assignments/ Excused Absences

Due dates are strict. Each late day means a 10% deduction from the grade received on the late assignment.

In the case of an emergency or an extenuating circumstance that causes you to miss class over an extended period of time, please notify me as soon as possible via e-mail. The student will be held responsible for missed class notes, handouts, and any announcements made in his or her absence.

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who, must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking quizzes. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

University Policy on Academic Misconduct

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.

UMatter, 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 so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is 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 9-1-1.

Online Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <http://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 of results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Tentative Course Timeline

Jan. 9	Introductions and syllabus review. Key concepts of media ethics. Ethics and morality. Ethics and Law. Ethical dilemma.
Jan. 16	Analytical reasoning: Six fundamental questions. Read: "Ethics and moral reasoning" Chapter 1 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i>

Jan. 23	<p>Codes of ethics</p> <p>SPJ Code of Ethics, RTDNA Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice of the American Association of Advertising Agencies</p> <p>Codes of ethics in the digital age</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: “Code of ethics and justification models” Chapter 2 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Jan. 30	<p>Professional cultures</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: “Media traditions and the paradox of professionalism” Chapter 3 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p> <p>Due: Response paper 1</p>
Feb. 6	<p>Moral psychology</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: “Moral development and the expansion of empathy” Chapter 4 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Feb. 13	<p>Including the perspectives and values of diverse stakeholders on ethical reasoning</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: “Loyalty and diversity” Chapter 5 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Feb. 20	<p>Values across mass communication disciplines</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: “Personal and professional values” Chapter 6 in <i>Doing Ethics in</i></p>

	<i>Media</i>
Feb. 27	<p>Misinformation and fact-checking</p> <p>Media trust</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Truth and deception" Chapter 7 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p> <p>Due: Response paper 2</p>
Mar. 6	Spring Break – No class meeting
Mar. 13	<p>Mass media privacy issues</p> <p>Privacy in the digital age</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Privacy and public life" Chapter 8 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Mar. 20	<p>Persuasion and information processing</p> <p>Propaganda and the news</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Persuasion and propaganda" Chapter 9 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Mar. 27	<p>Consequentialistic and deontological reasoning</p> <p>Utilitarianism</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Consequentialism and utility" Chapter 10 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Apr. 3	Deontology and ethical decision making

	<p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Deontology and moral rules" Chapter 11 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p> <p>Due: Response paper 3</p>
Apr. 10	<p>Overview of ethical principles</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Virtue, justice and care" Chapter 11 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Apr. 17	<p>Media accountability</p> <p>Media credibility (source, medium, and message)</p> <p>Case study discussion</p> <p>Read: "Accountability, transparency and credibility" Chapter 12 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i></p>
Apr. 24	Putting it all together 5 Ws and H
May 1	Due: Analysis paper