

MMC 3203, Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications

Spring 2016

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Overview

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.*

Much of what we learn in college and in life helps us sort right from wrong. A big part of education in advertising, journalism, public relations and telecommunication is learning right from wrong—what you're supposed to do versus what you're not supposed to do. From introductory principles courses (e.g., ADV 3008, JOU 1001, PUR 3000, RTV 3007) to *Law of Mass Communication* (MMC 4200), students learn what they should and should not do as matters of professional practice and legal responsibility. But in media, as with any discipline, difficult dilemmas arise when we recognize that some issues are not matters of right versus wrong or legal versus illegal. Some of the toughest issues are *right versus right!* These issues raise moral questions, and we will work to answer them in this course.

In this course we will learn and practice techniques for identifying and analyzing ethical issues and problems in mass communications.

Prerequisites

2JM designation and ADV 3008, JOU 1001, PUR 3000 or RTV 3007 with minimum grade of C.

Resources

Canvas

<http://elearning.ufl.edu/>

Required Textbook

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

Requisite Skills for this Course

You should be prepared to 1) manage academic responsibilities and meet deadlines on the Canvas online course management system, 2) employ analytical skills in the evaluation of situations and content presented in course lectures and readings, 3) articulate these thoughts and ideas clearly in writing, including online forums, and 4) justify/defend your own perspectives, as well as argue on behalf of perspectives that potentially run counter to your position about ethics situations.

Course Goals

Successful completion of this course will require you to:

- Demonstrate understanding of key principles and concepts of media ethics.
- Recognize the most pressing moral issues facing media professionals today.
- Develop analytical skills to resolve dilemmas through a systematic ethical reasoning process.
- Apply ethical reasoning standards across multiple mass communication disciplines.

Expectations and Assignments

Online Discussion Participation (25%)

Your contributions to online discussions are a major part of this course. Attached is the rubric for online discussions.

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Comprehension and evaluation of key components of the module's required readings and online resources	Posts demonstrate clear and analytical understanding.	Posts indicate an awareness of course resources.	Posts do not respond to course resources.
Insight and originality to help create dialogue	Posts were thoughtful and interesting.	Posts showed evidence of original thinking.	Posts echoed other points or expressed general agreement/disagreement.
Meaningful connections	Posts relevant to discussion, with meaningful connections to other course content, personal experience, current events, etc.	Posts on topic and relevant to discussion.	Posts not relevant to discussion prompts or course content.
Grammar, spelling, and coherence	Very well written and organized.	Generally well written and organized, some spelling/grammar issues.	Unclearly written or organized or hard to follow (possibly due to spelling/grammar issues).
Timeliness and interaction	Posted early enough for classmates to respond and posted later in response to others.	Involved in discussion boards either early or late, but limited interaction with classmates.	Limited meaningful interaction with classmates.

Students who lead weekly class discussions will use the rubric to evaluate their peers confidentially. The instructor will then take these peer evaluations into account when assigning participation grades. Participation assessments will be posted twice during the term: once after Modules 1-4 and again after Modules 5-7. The two participation scores will be weighted evenly. Combined they will account for 25% of your course grade.

Discussion-leading Group Project (20%)

You will be randomly assigned to a group of students who will lead the class discussion for one of the two-week modules during the semester. Your group's job is as follows.

- Connect with your group on Canvas using the “Collaborations” function. Groups will be assigned at the end of drop-add.
- Sign up for a module to lead on the “Module Sign-up” page in Module 1.
- Read the assigned readings for your assigned weeks as soon as you get a chance.
- Collaborate with your group to develop two discussion prompts (one for each chapter) and provide related case articles or videos that you find to use as springboards for discussion.
- E-mail your group’s two prompts to the instructor by Thursday prior to the week your module starts. Monitor and lead the class discussion between Monday of the first week and Wednesday of the second week.
- Collaborate with your group to write and edit a synopsis (about two pages for each prompt) and email it to the instructor by 5 p.m. on Friday of the second week. One synopsis will be submitted by the group.
- Complete a confidential peer discussion rubric for each classmate (including your group members) and submit your evaluations document directly to the assignment page. Each group member will do their own individual evaluations of all their classmates. The instructor will take these peer evaluations into account when assigning discussion participation grades.

Task	Due Date
Sign up for a week to host discussion using the “Collaborations” section of Canvas	January 11
Read the chapters for your week. Choose appropriate cases/examples for discussion.	At least one week before your discussion
E-mail discussion question(s) to instructor.	Thursday of the week before your discussion
Moderate/lead the online discussions.	Normally Monday of first week through Wednesday of second week. Discussion closes at 5 p.m. on second Wednesday so you can start writing synopses and conducting peer evals. (Dates are slightly adjusted on weeks with holidays – see calendar.)
Submit completed peer discussion rubrics.	5 p.m. Monday the week after your module ends (<i>extensions can be granted on weeks affected by holidays</i>)
Submit synopsis to instructor (instructor will edit if needed and post the following week)	5 p.m. Friday of second week (<i>extensions can be granted on weeks affected by holidays</i>)

Quizzes (20%)

Quizzes will cover each module's assigned readings and lectures. Quizzes may include multiple-choice, short-answer and matching questions. The idea is to motivate you to keep up with the reading and lectures. You will have only one opportunity to take each quiz during the specified module time period. Please see the timeline at the bottom of this syllabus and the schedule on Canvas.

Each quiz will have a time limit (normally 25 minutes, depending on the number and type of questions). You can take the quiz any time between the opening of the module on Monday of the first week and 5 p.m. on Friday of the second week of the module, but you will have only the specified amount of time to complete the quiz once you start. The idea behind the time limit is for you to prepare by organizing your knowledge of the course material in such a way that you can confidently answer questions quickly and accurately. Although there's no rule against using your notes and books, those who have mastered the material likely will perform MUCH better than those who try to look everything up as they go.

Taking each quiz must be an individual effort.

Analysis Paper (30%)

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, for a total length of about 6-12 pages. I recommend thinking of your paper topic near the beginning of

the semester so that you can think through the questions as they come up for discussion during the semester. You might then be able to draft sections of the paper as we go.

Other Participation (5%)

This includes assignments that will be tracked as complete/incomplete/late. Meeting deadlines and quality of effort are important here to keep the course running smoothly.

- Update Canvas profile by 1/7
- Ethical analysis paper topic due 3/29
- Rough draft of ethical analysis paper due Friday 4/15
- Peer reviews of paper drafts due Wednesday 4/20

Student Learning Outcomes and Grading

	Understand principles and concepts	Recognize moral issues	Develop analytical skills to resolve dilemmas	Apply ethical reasoning across disciplines	Grade weight
Quizzes	✓	✓			20%
Online discussion participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	25%
Discussion-leading	✓	✓	✓	✓	20%
Analysis paper	✓	✓	✓		30%
Other deadlines & participation					5%
					100%

Final grade requirements

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89.9
- C = 70-79.9
- D = 60-69.9
- F = 59.9 and below

UF Policies

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. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the exams. 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 <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>.

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. See the course netiquette guidelines at <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/319319/pages/netiquette>.

Getting Help

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

** Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request make-up work.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help> for:

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

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.

Tentative Course Timeline

	General Topics	Notes and Deadlines
Module 1	<p>Introductions and syllabus</p> <p>Ethics and moral reasoning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to course resources by 1/6 • Update Canvas profile by 1/7 • Module 1 discussions open Tuesday 1/5-Wednesday 1/13 • Groups sign up for discussion-leading by 1/11
Module 2	<p>Codes of ethics and justification models</p> <p>Media traditions and the paradox of professionalism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 2 discussions open Tuesday 1/19* - Wednesday 1/27 (<i>Monday 1/18 is MLK Day</i>)
Module 3	<p>Moral development and the expansion of empathy</p> <p>Loyalty and diversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 3 discussions open Monday 2/1 - Wednesday 2/10
Module 4	<p>Personal and professional values</p> <p>Truth and deception</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 4 discussions open Monday 2/15 - Wednesday 2/24 • Midterm participation assessment will be posted following Module 4
<i>SPRING BREAK 2/29-3/5</i>		
Module 5	<p>Privacy and public life</p> <p>Persuasion and propaganda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 5 discussions open Monday 3/7 - Wednesday 3/16
Module 6	<p>Consequentialism and utility</p> <p>Deontology and moral rules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 6 discussions open Monday 3/21 - Wednesday 3/30 • Ethical analysis paper topic due 3/29
Module 7	<p>Virtue, justice and care</p> <p>Accountability, transparency and credibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 7 discussions open Monday 4/4 - Wednesday 4/13 • Second participation assessment will be posted following Module 7
Module 8	<p>Putting it all together</p> <p>5 Ws and H</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rough draft of ethical analysis paper due Friday 4/15 • Peer reviews of paper drafts due Wednesday 4/20 • Final paper due Friday 4/22