

MMC 3203: ETHICS AND PROBLEMS IN MASS COMMUNICATION Fall 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 (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.

News Sources

No subscriptions or outside reading are required, but staying up-to-date with daily local, national, and international news will enhance the discussions for the class.

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.

Social Media

If you do not already have one, please sign up for a Twitter account. Follow me @Britt_Sahm. I will be posting updates and reminders for class, as well as posts on current events related to the course. This should be interactive! If you find any interesting articles, or have a comment to share for the class, we will be using the hashtag #MMC3203 for the semester.

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

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 Wednesday and 5 p.m. on Friday of each module week, 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.

Online Discussion Participation (20%)

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. The instructor will ultimately decide your grade – the peer evaluations are used as a tool. Participation assessments will be posted two times throughout the semester – after Module 3 (10/14) and after Module 7 (11/25). The two participation scores will be weighted evenly. Combined they will account for 20% of your course grade. *Each week you will receive an assessment of your discussion during that week's chapter based on the rubric. This will not be graded, but will help you see where you stand in terms of the discussion 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 one discussion prompt for each of your assigned chapters and provide related case articles or videos that you find to use as springboards for discussion.
- E-mail your group’s prompts to the instructor by Friday prior to the week your module starts (The first scheduled group only will have until Sunday at 5PM due to the limited interaction with group members at the beginning). Monitor and lead the class discussion between Monday and Wednesday of each discussion-leading week.
- Collaborate with your group to write and edit a synopsis (about 2-3 pages for each prompt) and email it to the instructor by 5 p.m. on the second Friday of your discussion-leading week. **One synopsis will be submitted by the group.**
- Complete a confidential peer discussion rubric for each group members and submit your evaluations document directly to the assignment page. **Each group member will do their own individual evaluations.** The instructor will take these peer evaluations into account when assigning grades for the assignment.

Task	Due Date
Sign up for a week to host discussion using the “Collaborations” section of Canvas	Thursday, Sept. 1
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.	Friday of the week before your discussion
Moderate/lead the online discussions.	Normally Monday –Wednesday for each chapter. Discussion closes at 9 p.m. on each Wednesday. (Dates are slightly adjusted on weeks with holidays – see calendar.)
Submit completed peer discussion rubrics.	5 p.m. Friday of the second discussion-leading week (<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 the second discussion-leading week (<i>extensions can be granted on weeks affected by holidays</i>)

Weekly Reflection Paper (10%)

As ethics are individualized involving many differing factors and situations, it is important you can connect the topics with your professional interests. Each week you will submit a one-page reflection based on the week’s chapter and discussion topics. This assignment is meant to serve as a tool to focus your thoughts from the week into your own synopsis. There are no right or wrong answers, but you should be critically examining the concepts and ideas discussed in the textbook, lecture, and discussion. You can treat the paper as a wrap up to the week’s lesson, and also an opportunity to address any lingering questions you feel were

unanswered. **Your paper should not be a summary of the class discussion.** I encourage you to bring in and examine prior personal and professional experiences relating to the topic from a (hopefully) new perspective.

**Students who are leading the discussion for the week will not submit a reflection.

Analysis Paper (25%)

For the analysis paper, your assignment will be to identify a current case in media ethics (within the last 5 years) in which you would have acted differently than the media practitioner(s) at the center of it. You will choose one individual involved in the case you are examining, and you will write the paper from the perspective of that individual's actions – how would you have acted differently in the situation? The goal of the paper is to allow you to use materials from your textbook, discussions, and lectures to analyze a moral dilemma in the media.

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. From previous semesters, I have found that the ideal length of the paper is around 10-12 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 Monday 8/29
- Ethical analysis paper topic due Friday 10/21
- Rough draft of ethical analysis paper due Friday 12/2
- Peer reviews of paper drafts due Tuesday 12/6

Final Grade Requirements

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	70-76
B+	87-89	D	60-69
B	83-86	E	Below 60
B-	80-82		

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	✓	✓	✓	✓	20%
Discussion-leading	✓	✓	✓	✓	20%
Weekly Reflection	✓	✓	✓	✓	10%
Analysis paper	✓	✓	✓		25%
Other deadlines & participation					5%
					100%

Important Deadlines

Ethical Analysis Paper Topic	Due Friday 10/21 at 5:00pm
Ethical Analysis Paper Draft	Due Friday 12/2 at 5:00pm
Peer reviews for paper draft	Due Tuesday 12/7 at 5:00pm
Final Ethical Analysis Paper	Due Monday 12/12 at 5:00pm

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 translates into your work as a future communicator, as your work will be seen and read by a public audience. These are fundamental values of the University community. As a student of the University of Florida, you have agreed to read and comply with the University Student Conduct and Honor Codes. 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.

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

	General Topics	Weekly Checklist
<p><i>Module 1</i></p> <p>Aug. 22 – Sept. 2</p>	<p>Introductions and syllabus</p> <p>Ethics and moral reasoning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to course resources by 8/24 • Update Canvas profile by 8/29 • Intro discussion open Monday 8/22-Friday 8/26 • Ethics and moral reasoning discussion open 8/29 – 9/2 • Groups sign up for discussion-leading by 9/1 • Reflection #1 due Friday 9/2 • Module 1 quiz due Friday 9/2
<p><i>Module 2</i></p> <p>Sept. 5-16</p>	<p>Codes of ethics and justification models</p> <p>Media traditions and the paradox of professionalism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of ethics discussion open *Tuesday 9/6 - Thursday 9/8 (<i>Labor Day</i> is Monday 9/5) • Reflection #2 due Friday 9/9 • Media traditions discussion open Monday 9/12 – Wednesday 9/14 • Reflection #3 due Friday 9/16 • Module 2 Quiz due Friday 9/16
<p><i>Module 3</i></p> <p>Sept. 19-30</p>	<p>Moral development and the expansion of empathy</p> <p>Loyalty and diversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral development discussion open Monday 9/19 – Wednesday 9/21 • Reflection #4 due Friday 9/23 • Loyalty and diversity discussion open Monday 9/26 – Wednesday 9/28 • Reflection #5 due Friday 9/30 • Module 3 Quiz due Friday 9/30
<p><i>Module 4</i></p> <p>Oct. 3-14</p>	<p>Personal and professional values</p> <p>Truth and deception</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and professional values discussion open Monday 10/3 - Wednesday 10/5 • Reflection #6 due Friday 10/7 • Truth and deception discussion open Monday 10/10 – Wednesday 10/12 • Reflection #7 due 10/14 • Module 4 Quiz due Friday 10/14 • Midterm participation scores will be posted following Module 4

<p><i>Module 5</i></p> <p>Oct. 17-28</p>	<p>Privacy and public life</p> <p>Persuasion and propaganda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy and public life discussion open Monday 10/17 – Wednesday 10/19 • Reflection #8 due Friday 10/21 • Ethical Analysis Paper Topic due Friday 10/21 • Persuasion and propaganda discussion open Monday 10/24 – Wednesday 10/26 • Reflection #9 due Friday 10/28 • Module 5 quiz due Friday 10/28
<p><i>Module 6</i></p> <p>Oct. 31 – Nov. 11</p>	<p>Consequentialism and utility</p> <p>Deontology and moral rules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequentialism and utility discussion open Monday 10/21 – Wednesday 11/2 • Reflection #10 due Friday 11/4 • Deontology and moral rules discussion open Monday 11/7 – Wednesday 11/9 • No reflection for 11/11 • Module 6 Quiz due Friday 11/11
<p><i>Module 7</i></p> <p>Nov. 14-25</p>	<p>Virtue, justice and care</p> <p>Accountability, transparency and credibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtue, justice, and care discussion open Monday 11/14 – Wednesday 11/16 • Accountability discussion open *Thursday 11/17 – Monday 11/21 (<i>Thanksgiving Break</i> schedule changes) • Module 7 Quiz due *Tuesday 11/22 (<i>Thanksgiving Break</i> is 11/23-11/25) • NO REFLECTION THIS MODULE • Second participation assessment will be posted following Module 7
<p><i>Module 8</i></p> <p>Nov. 28 – Dec. 9</p>	<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 12/2 • Peer reviews for ethical analysis drafts due Tuesday 12/6 • **Final paper due Monday December 12 at 5:00 PM