

## MMC 3203, Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications

Fall 2016 section 196E/Weimer 1094

Mondays 10th period, 5:10-6 p.m. and Wednesdays 10-11th period, 5:10-7:05 p.m.

Professor: Kathy Sohar, PhD [ksfl@ufl.edu](mailto:ksfl@ufl.edu) cell- 352-284-3144

Office hours: after class Mondays and by appt.



**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.*

**Course Description:** This course is a study of ethical systems and philosophies and their applications to the practice of mass communication. Ethics is based on philosophical principles; however, ethics is also concerned with the results of choices, beliefs, values, and behaviors. The emphasis will be on principles and procedures in ethics, with examples and applications drawn from news, entertainment, and persuasion media; from advertising and public relations sources, from broadcast and print media, and from cyberspace. As this is a course in “applied ethics,” we will consider individual and institutional ethics—i.e., personal/professional decision making—as well as systemic/media issues.

In this time of dramatic changes to mass media professions and practices, we do well to consider traditional and emerging issues in ethics. If “everyone’s a journalist now,” are there any enduring principles, or is everything relative? As the lines blur among basic media functions—information, persuasion, and entertainment—what is the moral media practitioner to do? What are the ramifications of decisions made by media practitioners? What sense do consumers make of all these changes?

“Mass Communication Ethics” will explore theories and practical applications of ethics for media practitioners and consumers—i.e., for each and every one of us!

**Course Expectations:** For you and the whole class to get the most out of this course you should:

- Participate – both in terms of attendance, and in sharing your perspectives and thoughts. If you are shy do your best to engage. If you are a strong extrovert please do your best to allow space for others and practice listening. In person and online participation both count. I hope you will engage in both formats but you have some options (note: online participation does NOT replace in class attendance).
- Be respectful – both in how you share your views and how you respond to others
- Be open. This class is intended to make you question things – which may include long-standing beliefs and values. Try to commit to seeing things from multiple viewpoints and practice objective thinking.
- Disengage from your cellphone/devices during class time. Taking notes on your computer is fine. Texting throughout the class while others are sharing is not.

**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.



**Textbook:** Jay Black and Chris Roberts (2011), *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge. This text is also available online for free via the UF library system: When you click on the link it should prompt you to log-in with your Gatorlink and then lead you to the e-book. <http://bit.ly/2bfrTjc>

**Resources:** We will be using UF Canvas online as a supplemental discussion board. Additional external material may be posted here as required reading/viewing. <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>

## Course Schedule

Listed reading assignments should be read before that day's class.

Date	Lecture Topic	READINGS Readings (due before class)
Week 1 Aug 22, 24	Introduction Ethics and Moral Reasoning	Introduction and Chapter 1
Week 2 Aug 29, 31	Codes, justifications	Chapter 2
Week 3 Sept 7 (no class on 5 <sup>th</sup> )	Traditions, professionalism	Chapter 3
Week 4 Sept 12, 14	Moral development	Chapter 4
Week 5 Sept 19, 21	Loyalty, diversity	Chapter 5
Week 6 Sept 26, 28	Personal and professional values	Chapter 6
Week 8 Oct 3, 5	<b>Exam</b>	<i>(maybe begin chap 7)</i>
Week 9 Oct 10,12	Truth, deception	Chapter 7
Week 10 Oct 17,19	Privacy	Chapter 8
Week 11 Oct 24, 26	Propaganda	Chapter 9
Week 12 Oct 31, Nov 2	Consequentialism	Chapter 10
Week 13 Nov 7, 9	Deontology	Chapter 11
Week 14 Nov 14, 16	<b>Exam</b>	<i>(maybe begin Chap 12)</i>
Week 15 Nov 21 - no class Nov 23	TBA 21st	Chapter 12
Week 16 Nov 28, Nov 30	Accountability	Chapter 13
Dec 5, 7	Paper topic share in class. Final discussions.	
	<b>Final papers due in class Dec 7<sup>th</sup></b>	

### Grading:

Participation: 30%. Both in class and online

Tests: 40% - 2 tests 20% each

Final Paper: 30%

Participation grades will include attendance as well as in class and online discussion with attention to the following elements:

- Comments (in class and online) demonstrate clear and analytical understanding
- Comments are thoughtful and relevant to discussion. Have meaningful connections to course content, current events, personal experience, etc.
- Comments are respectful (this does not mean you cannot address controversial topics, but respect for your fellow classmates should be factored)

**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). The paper should be organized in a way that makes clear how you will answer the six major questions from *Doing Ethics in Media*:

- **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.
- **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?
- **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?
- **What's it worth?** Prioritize your values—both moral and non-moral values—and decide which one(s) you won't compromise.
- **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?
- **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.

*I look forward to getting to know you and to an engaging semester as we explore this important topic. Please always feel free to contact me with questions, suggestions or concerns!*

**Additional information:**



**April Hines Librarian**

**Office:** 1060P Weimer

**Phone:** 352-273-2266

**Email:** [aprhone@uflib.ufl.edu](mailto:aprhone@uflib.ufl.edu)

Office hours – Thursday 1-4 in PATH.

April can assist you with research for your papers. She is very helpful and willing to work with you!

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism is not tolerated. All work should be yours, or properly cited.

The Honor Code: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

Absenteeism:

Attendance in class is expected. However, it is understood that circumstances may arise that are unavoidable and may require you to miss class. If that is the class ideally, please let me know in advance (email is preferable). If prior notice is not possible, please contact me after the fact. Exceptions are also made for religious holidays or the UF rules regarding extracurricular activities. Please do notify me in these circumstances as well per the guidelines cited earlier. Unless otherwise discussed, participation in online discussions should still be maintained even when a student cannot attend class in person. Please note that online discussions do not substitute in class attendance under normal circumstances.

Students With Disabilities:

UF is committed to supporting students with disabilities. Please let me know if you have a disability and are working with the Disability Resource Center.