

**MMC 3203 Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications**  
**Course Syllabus, Spring 2020**  
Mondays, 5:10 to 8:10 p.m.  
MAEB, Room 0234

---

**Instructor:** Michael Stone

**Office hours:** Before or after class, or by appointment

**Contact:** MichaelStone428@gmail.com or @Michael\_Stone (two underscores) on Twitter. I guarantee a response within 48 hours but will likely get back with you more quickly.

**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 and student objectives**

In other words, this course will introduce you to some of the more common ethical issues and dilemmas mass communicators encounter and explore possibilities for how to respond. It’s meant to equip you with tools for and practice in thinking about how to identify and resolve these ethical problems, some of which you will likely face as a professional.

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

1. Identify ethical dilemmas within mass communication, including determining how to anticipate, consider, and appreciate diverse perspectives and values coming from different stakeholders.
2. Identify and articulate a variety of responses to such dilemmas.
3. Use past ethical considerations and standards to reason through your responses.
4. Make and justify decisions about which response or responses are ethically best.

**Required text and readings**

Black, J., & Roberts, C. *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge. (The library offers this as a free e-book.)

You’re expected to complete the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. The readings come mainly from the *Doing Ethics in Media* textbook and case studies I’ll upload to Canvas. Completing these in line with the schedule at the end of this syllabus will be crucial to successfully completing the course.

## Coursework

**1. Participation and attendance.** The topic of ethics lends itself to discussion, so we'll be doing that quite a bit in class. Participating in discussions is required, thus making preparation (doing the readings) and attendance required, as will be explained more in the section on class policies. During the discussions, you should demonstrate that you're thinking about the issues by asking questions, offering your own opinions, and justifying these opinions. (Please remember to be respectful of those who may hold a position different from yours.)

Getting all five participation points means you participated in discussions almost every class, four means you spoke regularly, three occasionally, two maybe once or twice, one nothing all semester but were at least attentive, and none nothing all semester and were inattentive, were a distraction to the class, etc.

**2. Response papers.** These papers are one- to two-page write-ups that give you practice in applying ethical reasoning to situations you might encounter professionally. They will also help prepare you for our two exams and the group project.

**2. Exams.** The two exams, a midterm and a final, cover roughly half the course each. Expect multiple-choice questions and some short essays. The essays will be scored based on a rubric, which emphasizes clearly demonstrating your understanding of the issues, your ability to apply ethical reasoning to those issues, and your skill in clearly expressing and defending your position. More specific details about the exams will be provided closer to exam time.

**3. Group projects.** Near the end of the semester, you'll be divided into groups, and each group will explore a different, real-world ethical topic mass communicators face. Similar to the exams' essay questions, these projects will assess your abilities in demonstrating a clear understanding of the issue, applying ethical reasoning to that issue, and articulating and defending how your group would handle the situation. A rubric will be provided here, too. Groups will present their respective issues to their classmates and lead a classroom discussion.

## Grading totals

- Participation points
    - In-class participation 5 points
    - Attendance 10 points
  - Response papers (5 points each) 15 points
  - Exams
    - Midterm 25 points
    - Final 25 points
  - Group project 20 points
- 100 points**

**Grade scale** (scores ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to next whole number; scores ending in any decimal below that, including .4, are not rounded up)

A	= 90–100	C+	= 77–79	D	= 60–66
B+	= 87–89	C	= 70–76	E	= 0–59
B	= 80–86	D+	= 67–69		

## **Class policies**

**1. Attendance and tardiness.** Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every class. You are permitted to miss one class without documentation or penalty; each unexcused absence after that means losing one point from your 10 attendance points. Arriving late without letting the instructor know a reason beforehand counts as half an absence; leaving early without letting the instructor know a reason beforehand counts as half an absence (so being late and leaving early would count as a full absence). With proper documentation, you are allowed miss class because of an illness; family emergency; athletic, legal, or military obligation; etc. — but you have to let me know at least 24 hours in advance and have to provide the documentation. And if your excused absence falls on a class by which something is due, you'll be expected to submit it by a new deadline: the original deadline plus however many excused days listed on your documentation.

**2. Classroom demeanor.** The discussions are what should make this class energetic and fun, but that will happen only if everyone fully participates. As already noted, each student is expected to participate in discussions and complete the readings prior to class; those who don't likely won't be able to gain all the participation points.

**3. Deadlines.** Due dates are strict, and assignments should be handed in when collected by the instructor in class on the date they're due. Each late day — including the day of class if the paper isn't turned in when the instructor attempts to collect it — means a 10-point deduction.

**4. Cell phones and other devices.** Research shows that students who multitask in class end up learning less and thus receive lower grades. Therefore, cell phones (except to take pictures of slides) and laptops are not permitted. I realize communications is a technology-driven field and that a few of you might use your devices responsibly, but unfortunately, the majority of your classmates flock to social media and other sites rather than paying attention. More importantly, devices and a discussion-based course like this don't mix. So if you're seen using a phone (except to take pictures of slides) or laptop, you'll be asked to turn it off and put it up, and you'll lose participation points. For taking notes, use your phone's camera, a pen and paper, and/or an audio recorder.

**5. Academic integrity.** University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty, such as, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism,

fabrication of sources or information from sources, reusing a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own, and having someone else complete your work for you. If you're unsure of whether something constitutes a violation of academic integrity, ask me **before** you do it to avoid the possibility of being reported to the university's Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If you already haven't, you should also review UF's full guidelines: [www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code). Spotting academic dishonesty is easier than you might think from a teacher's perspective, and committing it means failing the assignment, possibly failing the entire course, and opening yourself to possible discipline for the university. Ignorance is not an excuse.

**6. Disability assistance.** Students with disabilities may seek reasonable accommodations by first registering with UF's Disability Resource Center (Reid Hall, 352-392-8565, <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>). The center will provide you with documentation, which must then be given to me within the first two weeks of class. Failure to do so within this timeframe will likely limit the possibilities for accommodations.

**7. Seeking help.** A terrific, free resource that helps students manage stress and life is the UF Counseling and Wellness Center at 3190 Radio Road on campus. The center is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, call 352-392-1575 or visit [www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc).

**8. Course evaluations.** At the end of the course, students are asked to give an evaluation at <http://www.evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester.

### Course schedule

Please note that this schedule is tentative and may change, especially concerning guest speakers, who might be added once I've made final confirmations or removed because of last-minute conflicts. I will inform you of any such changes as far in advance as possible.

Items that you should have completed *prior* to their respective class are marked in bold: **Read** or **Due**. All other items simply make up the tentative in-class schedule for that day.

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Jan. 6  | Introduction to the course, syllabus, and ethics<br><b>Read:</b> Class 1 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page  |
| Jan. 13 | Introduction to the SPJ Code of Ethics<br>Lecture and textbook discussion<br>Case study discussion<br><b>Read:</b> "What's Your Problem?" and Chapter 1 in <i>Doing Ethics in Media</i> |

- Read:** Class 2 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page
- Jan. 20 **NO CLASS (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)**
- Jan. 27 Continue with the SPJ Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** "Why Not Follow the Rules?" and Chapter 2 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 3 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page  
**Due:** Response paper
- Feb. 3 Continue with the SPJ Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
Guest speaker: Dianna Hoyt on how the media can help but especially hurt victims and their families when reporting on tragic events  
**Read:** Chapter 3 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 4 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page
- Feb. 10 Continue with the SPJ Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** "Who Wins, Who Loses?" and Chapter 4 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 5 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page  
**Due:** Response paper
- Feb. 17 Introduction to the RTDNA Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** Chapter 5 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 6 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page
- Feb. 24 **MIDTERM EXAM (same room and time)**  
Review will be posted to Canvas in Class 7 folder
- March 2 **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**
- March 9 Continue with the RTDNA Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** "What's It Worth?" and Chapter 6 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 8 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page

- March 16 Continue with the RTDNA Code of Ethics  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
Guest speaker: tentative and TBA  
**Read:** Chapter 7 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 9 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page
- March 23 Introduction to the Standards of Practice of the American Association  
of Advertising Agencies  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** Chapter 8 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 10 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page
- March 30 Continue with the Standards of Practice of the American Association  
of Advertising Agencies  
Lecture and textbook discussion  
Case study discussion  
**Read:** Chapter 9 in *Doing Ethics in Media*  
**Read:** Class 11 documents in the Files tab on our Canvas page  
**Due:** Response paper
- April 6 **Presentations:** Groups 1, 2 and 3  
**Read:** "Who's Whispering in Your Ear?" and Chapters 10 and 11 in  
*Doing Ethics in Media* (because of group presentations, we won't have  
time to go over the readings in class, but material from them could  
appear on the final exam)
- April 13 **Presentations:** Groups 4, 5 and 6  
**Read:** Chapter 12, "How's Your Decision Going to Look?" and Chapter  
13 in *Doing Ethics in Media* (because of group presentations, we won't  
have time to go over the readings in class, but material from them  
could appear on the final exam)
- April 20 **FINAL EXAM (same room and time)**  
Review will be posted to Canvas