

LAW OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

MMC 4200, Section No. _____

Fall 2020

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Course Description and Goals

This course will facilitate an understanding of the law, which guarantees and protects the privileges and defines the responsibilities of the mass media. This includes problems of constitutional law, libel, privacy, and governmental regulations.

The goal of this class is to build an awareness of the legal issues that media professionals may encounter during their careers. This course will provide students with the legal and historical underpinnings of the many facets of media careers. This, in turn, will assist students in understanding their places within the rules and regulations in media law.

By the end of this course students will: know their rights and responsibilities in accordance with media law; be able to describe the legal and historical foundations of the laws affecting media careers; be able to find, analyze and interpret the rule of law in judicial opinions and both state and federal statutes; be able to apply the rule of law to real-life situations.

My goal for this class is to help you understand why the law is important and how it relates to you as a professional and as a person. I am a recent graduate of UF, where I received my law degree and Master's in Mass Communications. I am currently a practicing attorney at Banker Lopez Gassler P.A. in Tampa, Florida. I decided to go to law school after I took this class as a journalism student in undergrad. I love these topics and I want to make this class a good experience for you. I know that the law can be dry or intimidating to some, but my goal is to make this material as interesting and relatable as possible.

COVID-19 Disclaimer

This is an online course with no in-person class offerings. The lectures will be posted on each week's Canvas Page and will be viewable on demand. There are no changes to the way that this course is offered due to COVID-19. The lectures will be posted at the beginning of the semester and will be available until the end of the course.

Attendance and Participation

Since this is an online course, there is no “attendance policy.” Your successful completion of the assignments will demonstrate that you are keeping up with the course. As your instructor, I can see whether you are regularly logging into and remaining on the site. If I see that you are not interacting with the course regularly, please expect me to contact you. Do not expect to do well in this course if you fall well behind our course pace. This is a new area for a lot of you, and you cannot expect to learn and retain this information overnight.

Because there are no in-person lectures and class discussions, your careful reading of the textbook is crucial. Watching the lectures is NOT a substitute for doing the reading. You will not do well unless you watch the lectures and read the assigned sections of the book.

Readings

The book for the course is Mass Media Law, 21st Edition, by Clay Calvert, Dan V. Kozlowski, and Derigan Silver. Please check the syllabus for the assigned sections.

You are expected to check the Canvas course site regularly (at least once a week) to engage with the course content: viewing the lectures, contributing to the discussions, and so on. Each week will have its own Page on the Canvas site, and the Page will include:

- Links to online lecture videos hitting the high points of the chapter. The lectures and all course materials will remain viewable over the entire term so you can refer to them.
- Supplemental readings and links in addition to the textbook.
- Graded assignments, rubrics, and instructions regarding the assignments.

Assignments

Your grade will be based on:

1. Three exams (60% of your total grade)
2. Three discussion posts to the class discussion forum (15% of your total grade)
3. Three responses to your classmates’ discussion posts (5% of your total grade)
4. Two “case briefs” (20% of your total grade)

I will provide grading rubrics and guidelines available on Canvas showing the expectations for each assignment.

1. Exams

- I will post an online exam at three points during the course. The exams will be timed. Once you “check out” the exam, you will have a limited time to take it. I

will clearly indicate the deadlines for the exams in advance. Please see the attached schedule.

- The exams will be proctored by HonorLock, as required per UF policy. Additional information on the HonorLock specifications for each exam will be discussed prior to each exam opening date.

2. Discussion Posts

- I will post prompts on Canvas on which I will seek your analysis and reactions or feel free to write your own post based on what we have covered in class up to that point. You will need to write three discussion posts over the course of the semester to get full credit. Each discussion post should be approximately 5 paragraphs long. Posts are for class viewing only and not public.
- Please see the attached schedule for the due date of these posts.

3. Discussion Post Responses

- You will be required to post three responses to your classmates' discussion posts over the course of the semester. These responses should be 1-2 paragraphs long, addressing the post and providing some critical insight (NOT just "I agree/I disagree"). Since we are not in a classroom together, these responses are meant to facilitate some good discussion and exchange of ideas. I will be around in the posts and responses to start some conversations as well.
- Your responses will follow the same due dates as the discussion posts.

4. Case Briefs

- You will submit two case briefs during the semester—one during the first half of the course and one during the second half of the course. The briefs will demonstrate that you read and understand a court case pertaining to our subject matter. I will provide a list of cases for you to choose from for each assignment. You will be given a rubric and examples as to what these briefs should look like.

Extra Credit

I will provide an extra credit opportunity in the form of a final paper to raise your final grade. I will provide topics for you to choose from to write a 5-7 page research paper. I will also provide a rubric and more information regarding this optional paper towards the end of the semester. The extra credit paper will be due at the end of the semester. It will be my discretion as to how many points to award if you turn in this extra credit assignment. I also reserve the right to provide more extra credit opportunities as the semester progresses.

Grading

I will grade in accordance with University Policy on grade values as follows:

A:	100-94	C:	76-73
A-:	93-90	C-:	72-70
B+:	89-87	D+:	69-67
B:	86-83	D:	66-63
B-:	82-80	D-:	62-60
C+:	79-77	F:	59 and below

Disability Accommodations

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.ufl.edu/> with appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter to present to me. You must submit your documentation prior to turning in any assignments. Please submit your accommodation letter to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to design accommodations that will assist you in getting the maximum benefit out of the class.

Excuses from Assignments

Because you have at least a week to complete each graded assignment, I will not excuse anyone from completing an assignment with the exception of the most extreme, documented reason (your own hospitalization, a death or dire medical emergency involving a close family member). A trip for career, extracurricular or other purposes is not an “emergency,” because you have the assignments/deadlines in advance and because all of our work is portable and can be done remotely. Professionals (media, legal, or otherwise) must manage deadlines on a daily basis. I expect you to do the same.

If you are having technical difficulties that prevent you from submitting an assignment on time, please see the “Assistance” section of this syllabus. I will not excuse a late assignment due to technical difficulties without documentation that you have reached out the UF Help Desk. Please reach out to me as soon as you foresee an issue that you believe would keep you from submitting an assignment on time.

Office Hours and Availability

Because this is a virtual course and because I am not based in Gainesville, please consider the course to have a virtual open-door policy. Reach out as necessary and you will receive a timely response. Please keep in mind that I am a practicing attorney, so I will likely be responding to you later in the evenings and/or on weekends. If there is an issue that requires immediate attention, please text, call, or

email and I will get back to you as soon as possible. I prefer email and check it frequently. If your issue is less urgent, please use the Canvas messaging system.

Inclusive Environment

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including race, ethnicity, national origins, gender, gender identity, sexuality, class, and religion.

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit.

It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Your suggestions regarding ways to improve the effectiveness of this course (for you or for other students/groups) are encouraged and appreciated.

I will attempt to foster an environment in which each class member is able to hear and respect each other. It is critical that each class member show respect for all worldviews expressed in class. It is expected that some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions — please be respectful of others' emotions and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or other students, is particularly troubling or causes discomfort or offense. While our intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens throughout the course is not to be ignored and is something that I consider to be very important and deserving of attention.

All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. I expect common courtesy in discussion posts and communications associated with this course. An inability to maintain respect and decorum in all class-related communication will affect your discussion post grades. I am fine with critical analysis, questioning, and respectful disagreement. I am not fine with ad hominem attacks or disrespect to other students.

I personally strive to foster an environment that is as inclusive and respectful as possible. To help accomplish this, if you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know. If you feel like your performance in this class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please do not hesitate to contact me. I want to be a resource for you. If you would prefer to speak with someone outside the course, Joanna Hernandez, CJC Director of Inclusion and Diversity, is an excellent resource. You can email her at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.

Content Warning

Due to the nature of our course content (the First Amendment, broadcast indecency, libel, etc.) we will be encountering some profanity and sensitive subjects. As such, you might encounter ideas and thoughts you do not agree with. Please be advised that the readings will include some words or ideas that might be considered offensive. Refer to the statement in this syllabus on fostering an inclusive environment for further guidance on this topic.

Academic Misconduct

I have a zero-tolerance policy for academic misconduct. Please do your own work. You are all about to graduate and become professionals and I expect you to conduct yourselves accordingly. If you plagiarize, you will get a zero on that assignment and may be referred to the Student Conduct office. Please do not make me do that. It is fine to cite to a reliable online source in your assignments if you give proper credit and you synthesize the material in your own words.

Read the UF Honor Code:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

Technical Assistance

For issues with technical difficulties, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk at:

- helpdesk@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP
- <https://request.it.ufl.edu>

Late assignments due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received when the problem was reported. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. I will not accept an excuse for a late assignment based on technical difficulties if you have not contacted the Help Desk.

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <https://distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/>

Personal Assistance

Finally, your health, wellness, and safety are important to me and to UF. If there is anything interfering with your ability to get the most out of your learning experience, I want to help you access the resources and assistance you need. Please reach out to me or to the U Matter, We Care program. You can ask for confidential help by emailing umatter@ufl.edu, by calling 352-294-2273 or by visiting the Care Area on the third floor of Peabody Hall. There are crisis counselors available 24/7 at 352-392-1575.

I am also available to discuss life post-graduation or any other issue you might have beyond what I have listed above. I recently graduated from UF, and I know how stressful and intimidating transitioning to post-graduate life can be. If you are interested in going to law school or graduate school, I would love to chat about that with you. If you need job search help, application advice, or anything else, please do not hesitate to reach out. I am here to help in any way I can.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (August 31-September 6)

Introduction to the Legal System
Readings: Textbook Chapter 1

Week 2 (September 7-13)

The First Amendment
Readings: Textbook Chapter 2

Week 3 (September 14-20)

The First Amendment in Action
Readings: Chapter 3

Week 4 (September 21-27)

Defamation Principles
Readings: Chapter 4 and 5
Discussion Post 1 and Response 1 due by 11 pm on September 27

Week 5 (September 28-October 4)

Defamation Defenses and Damages
Readings: Chapter 6
Exam 1 must be taken by 11 pm on October 4

Week 6 (October 5-11)

Privacy: Appropriation and Intrusion
Readings: Chapter 7
Case Brief 1 due by 11 pm on October 11

Week 7 (October 12-18)

Privacy: False Light and Private Facts
Readings: Chapter 8

Week 8 (October 19-25)

Freedom of Information and Access
Readings: Chapter 9

Week 9 (October 26-November 1)

Protecting Sources
Readings: Chapter 10
Exam 2 must be taken by 11 pm on November 1

Week 10 (November 2-8)

Intellectual Property

Readings: Chapter 14
Discussion Post 2 and Response 2 due by 11 pm on November 8

Week 11 (November 9-15)

Commercial Speech
Readings: Chapter 15

Week 12 (November 16-22)

Obscenity and Indecency
Readings: Chapter 13
Case Brief 2 due by 11 pm on November 22

Week 13 (November 23-29)

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 (November 30-December 6)

Broadcasting and Online
Readings: Chapter 16
Discussion Post 3 and Response 3 due by 11 pm on December 6

Week 15 (December 7-13)

Reading Days December 10-11
Exam Period December 12-18
Exam 3 must be taken by 11 pm on December 18
Extra Credit Paper due by 11 pm on December 18