

LAW OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

MMC 4200, Section No. 29F9 (15150)

Spring 2024

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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 graduated from UF in 2016, where I received my law degree and master's in mass communications. I am currently a practicing media law attorney at Shullman Fugate PLLC 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 not all of you want to be lawyers, but my goal is to make this material as interesting and relatable as possible.

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.

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.

Lectures

I will record and upload the weekly lectures for viewing on your own schedule. I will also upload the accompanying PowerPoints, which will be accessible on each weekly page, as well as the Files tab of the course.

Readings

The book for the course is Mass Media Law, 22nd 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, taking the quizzes, etc. Each week will have its own Page on the Canvas site, and the Page will include:

- Links to online lecture videos and accompanying PowerPoints 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.
- Quizzes and any other graded assignments, rubrics, and instructions regarding the assignments.

Assignments

Your grade will be based on:

1. Weekly quizzes based on the text and lectures (40% of your total grade)
2. Two “case briefs” (30% of your total grade)
3. Final exam (30% of your total grade)

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

1. Weekly Quizzes

- Accompanying each weekly lecture and textbook reading will be a short quiz based on the information covered.

- The quizzes will be timed. Once you “check out” the quiz, you will have a limited time to take it. The quizzes must be taken by the end of the day on the Monday following the week covered.
- The quizzes will be proctored by HonorLock, as required per UF policy. The quizzes will be open-note. HonorLock will be calibrated to allow you to use electronic notes in Word or Google Doc format.

2. 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.

3. Final Exam

- There will be one final exam at the end of the semester covering the major concepts discussed during the course of the semester. I will be holding several review sessions and posting a study guide ahead of the final exam. The final exam is multiple choice through HonorLock.

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 |
| A-: | 93-90 |
| B+: | 89-87 |
| B: | 86-83 |
| B-: | 82-80 |
| C+: | 79-77 |
| C: | 76-73 |
| C-: | 72-70 |
| D+: | 69-67 |

D: 66-63
D-: 62-60
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). You have the assignments/deadlines in advance and all 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.

I will accept late assignments (case briefs) for partial credit. I will NOT re-open any quizzes after the deadline for submission has passed.

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 or taking a quiz 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 shows 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 communications associated with this course. A failure to adhere to this standard may affect your grade. 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

Many First Amendment issues are based in criticism, dissent, and other topics that some may find uncomfortable or offensive (i.e., flag burning or obscenity). We cannot study this material without those things. Due to the nature of our course content, 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 concepts that might be considered offensive.

Refer to the statement in this syllabus on fostering an inclusive environment above for further guidance on this topic.

Academic Misconduct

I have a zero-tolerance policy for academic misconduct. You may not turn in work that is not your own, including work generated by ChatGPT or other AI programs. Your exams and assignments will be monitored by HonorLock and other mechanisms to detect plagiarism – including the use of AI.

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://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/4-040_2021-12-06.pdf

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 am a UF graduate, 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 (January 8-14)

Introduction to the Course

The American Legal System

Readings: Syllabus, Textbook Chapter 1

Week 1 Quiz due by 11:59 pm January 14

Week 2 (January 15-21)

The First Amendment: The Meaning of Freedom

Readings: Textbook Chapter 2

Week 2 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on January 21

Week 3 (January 22-28)

The First Amendment: Contemporary Problems

Readings: Chapter 3

Week 3 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on January 28

Week 4 (January 29-February 4)

Defamation: Establishing a Case and Proof of Fault

Readings: Chapter 4 and 5

Week 4 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on February 4

Week 5 (February 5-11)

Defamation: Defenses and Damages

Readings: Chapter 6

Week 5 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on February 11

Week 6 (February 12-18)

Invasion of Privacy: Appropriation and Intrusion

Readings: Chapter 7

Week 6 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on February 18

Week 7 (February 19-25)

Invasion of Privacy: Publication of Private Facts and False Light

Readings: Chapter 8

Case Brief 1 due by 11:59 pm on February 25

Week 7 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on February 25

Week 8 (February 26-March 3)

Gathering Information: People, Places, Records, and Meetings

Readings: Chapter 9

Week 8 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on March 3

Week 9 (March 4-10)

Protecting of News Sources/Contempt Power

Free Press-Fair Trial

Readings: Chapter 10 and 11

Week 9 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on March 10

Week 10 (March 11-17)

SPRING BREAK

Week 11 (March 18-24)

Intellectual Property

Readings: Chapter 14

Week 11 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on March 24

Week 12 (March 25-31)

Regulation of Advertising

Readings: Chapter 15

Week 12 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on March 31

Week 13 (April 1-7)

Regulation of Obscene and Other Erotic Material

Readings: Chapter 13

Case Brief 2 due by 11:59 pm on April 7

Week 13 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on April 7

Week 14 (April 8-14)

Telecommunications Regulation

Readings: Chapter 16

Week 14 Quiz due by 11:59 pm on April 14

Week 15 (April 15-21)

Wrap Up/Review

Reading Days: April 25-26

Exam Period: April 27-May 3

Extra Credit Paper due by 11:59 pm on May 3

Final Exam must be taken by 11:59 pm on May 3