MMC3203 Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications, Fall 2025

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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 what you're supposed to do versus what you're not supposed to do. From introductory principles courses to *Law of Mass Communication,* students learn policies and rules as matters of professional practice and legal responsibility. 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 class, 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 3001 with 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.

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 and defend your own perspectives as well as argue on behalf of perspectives that potentially run counter to your position about ethics situations.

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 that includes the perspectives and values of diverse stakeholders.
- Apply ethical reasoning standards across multiple mass communication disciplines.

- Build a personal code of ethics with a foundation in ethical principles.
- Analyze the impact of an ethical decision on diverse stakeholders.

Expectations and Assignments

Formatting, Spelling and Grammar

Each of your assignments should be written to the best of your ability. Since you are acting as a professional communicator, you are expected to write using accurate grammar and spelling. Points will be deducted from assignments where the content has grammar and spelling errors.

There are several tools you can use to improve your writing ability or double-check your work. These include the following:

- Purdue Online Writing Lab to check grammar rules
- Citation Machine to assist with APA style source citing
- Grammarly to act as an additional check of your spelling and grammar

Online Discussions (25%)

Your contributions to online discussions are a major part of this course. Below is the rubric for online discussions. Initial responses must be 200 words minimum, and responses to classmates must be 100 words at least.

Category (10 pts total)	**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. No major grammar or spelling issues.	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. Student posted on the last possible day of interaction.

Participation & Peer Review (10%)

This includes engagement in discussions, peer feedback on the final paper draft, and respectful communication. A brief peer evaluation will also be submitted at the end of the term.

Group Case Activities (10%)

In selected modules, students will complete short group activities related to ethical decision-making. These may include brief slide decks, case briefs, or reflection posts submitted via Canvas.

Quizzes (20%)

Quizzes 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's time period.

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 during the module period, 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 better than those who try to look everything up as they go. Taking each quiz must be an individual effort. For specific dates, please see Canvas.

Ethical Analysis Paper (35%)

For the analysis paper, your assignment is to identify a case in media ethics in which you would have acted differently than the media practitioner(s) at the center of it. I recommend you draft your paper as we review each module.

The paper must be organized in a way clearly states how you will answer the six major questions:
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 on 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.

Formatting guidelines: Each section of the paper should be about 1-2 pages of actual content; you must use Calibri or Arial 12pt font or smaller; total length of the paper is 6-12 pages double-spaced; margins do not exceed 1" on all sides; and each section should be clearly labeled with the question as the heading. You will not use bullet points or other types of unordered lists in the paper.

Criteria	Excellent	Satisfactory	Minimum
"What's your problem?"	Briefly but clearly describes the case, what makes it a moral dilemma, and the specific ethical question to be answered. Applies appropriate concepts from class. Focuses on perspective of specific individual decision-maker working in media. Names the media practitioner clearly as specifically as possible.	Describes case. Focuses on perspective of organization or generic decision-maker working in media rather than identifiable individual. Applies concepts from class. Vaguely names the media practitioner or a corporation as a media practitioner.	Case lacks adequate description or is unclear on what makes it an ethical issue (as opposed to craft-based, professional issue).
"Why not follow the rules?"	Identifies, analyzes, and compares applicable precedents, guidelines, codes or laws. Explains if they can't resolve dilemma. Uses at least one code of ethics and/or one justification model mentioned in the class.	Names guidelines or codes that may apply, but light on comparison or analysis of why they do or don't apply.	Doesn't cite specific rules or guidelines or cites a few but doesn't clearly explain why they apply or don't. Defers to authority rather than principled moral reasoning.
"Who wins, who loses?"	Identifies major stakeholders and the impact decision is likely to have on each in the short term and long term. Selects and applies key concepts such as moral development, empathy, loyalty, and diversity.	Identifies some stakeholders or individuals who will be impacted and discusses possible consequences for them. Mentions key concepts.	Names some parties that may be affected by the decision, but doesn't frame impact based on key concepts.

Criteria	Excellent	Satisfactory	Minimum
"What's it worth?"	Prioritizes values—both moral and non-moral—and explains which one(s) won't be compromised and why (e.g., truth, deception, privacy, persuasion). Specifically discusses how values come into play in this situation.	Identifies and applies important values.	Names values, but discussion more visceral or based on tenacity than principled moral reasoning (see Ch. 1).
"Who's whispering in your ear?"	Selects schools of philosophy or sets of moral principles to consider, analyzes the options, and explains which apply best. Uses two or more philosophers that were discussed in the textbook.	Names key philosophers or ethical approaches, offers some explanation of why some are more appealing than others for this particular case.	Names key philosophers or ethical approaches, but doesn't show depth of understanding or analysis.
"How's your decision going to look?"	States clear conclusion and articulates consideration of what friends and other respected people will think about decision-making. Selects and applies key concepts such as accountability, transparency, and credibility.	Discusses what friends and other respected people will think about decision-making. Mentions key concepts.	Discusses what friends and other respected people will think about decision-making, but doesn't clearly apply key concepts from class.
Grammar, spelling and coherence.	Very well written and organized, especially clear and coherent. No grammar and spelling issues. Paragraphs are broken up to allow for clarity and ease of reading.	Generally well written and organized, some spelling/grammar issues.	Unclearly written or organized or hard to follow (possibly due to spelling/grammar issues).

Works Cited	Lists clearly in APA style all of the articles, textbooks, and videos used in the creation of the paper.	Lists links to articles or videos without proper APA citation rules.	Does not include a list or has an incomplete list.

Meeting deadlines and quality of effort are important here to keep the course running smoothly. Sections that do not meet the exact page requirements will receive a lower grade. You will have points deducted from this assignment for missing or submitting late work for the deadlines mentioned in this section.

Late Work and Emergency Exceptions
Late work will not be accepted unless accompanied by an official **Course Instructor Notification** from the U Matter, We Care office. Please submit documentation through umatter.ufl.edu in the case of emergencies. Do not send documentation directly to the instructor.

AI Policy for Student Work
Unless otherwise stated, all assignments must be your original work, completed without assistance from generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, GrammarlyGO, or similar platforms. Using these tools to generate, rewrite, or summarize your work is a violation of the UF Honor Code and will result in a **zero** for the assignment and potential disciplinary action. We will examine ethical considerations related to AI in media later in the semester. Until then, assume AI use is prohibited unless clearly allowed.

Final grade requirements
A	90-100	C	70-76
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	80-86	D	60-66
C+	77-79	E	Below 60

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 to submit 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 are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honorcode-student-conduct-code/. Writing assignments and ethical analysis paper assignments will be checked for plagiarism. Any assignment that has been plagiarized will be graded as an automatic zero.

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy
All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats.

Getting Help
For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:
- helpdesk@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- https://elearning.ufl.edu/student-help-faqs/

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

U Matter, 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 *UMatter, 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. They 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.

Course Timeline: The following topics will be explored throughout the semester. For specific dates and deadlines, please refer to Canvas.

Schedule	Book Chapters/Module Content
Module 1: (8/22-8/31) 2 weeks	Introductions & syllabus Ethics & moral reasoning (Intro & Ch 1)
Module 2: (9/1-9/14) 2 weeks	Codes of ethics & justification models (Ch 2) Media traditions & the paradox of professionalism (Ch 3)
Module 3: (9/15-9/28) 2 weeks	Moral development & the expansion of empathy (Ch 4) Loyalty & diversity (Ch 5)

Module 4: (9/29-10/12) 2 weeks	Personal & professional values (Ch 6) Truth & deception (Ch 7)
Module 5: (10/13-10/26) 2 weeks	Privacy & public life (Ch 8) Persuasion & propaganda (Ch 9)
Module 6: (10/27-11/9) 2 weeks	Consequentialism & Utility (Ch 10) Deontology & moral rules (Ch 11)
Module 7: (11/10 -11/23) 2 weeks	Virtue, justice & care (Ch 12) Accountability, transparency & credibility (Ch 13)
Module 8: (11/24-12/3) 2 weeks	Putting it all together 5 Ws & H