

MMC 3203: Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications

Fall 2025 (Section: 209H)

T/Period 8 (3:00- 3:50 PM), R/Period 8-9 (3:00- 4:55 PM)

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Office hours: 10A-12P T/R or by Zoom appointment.

COURSE 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 PURPOSE/INTENT:

In college and in life, we often learn to distinguish right from wrong. In fields like advertising, journalism, public relations, and telecommunications, this involves understanding professional and legal standards—what you should do versus what you should avoid in the context of professional or legal guidelines. However, media and other disciplines frequently present complex dilemmas where issues are not just about right versus wrong or legal versus illegal. Often, the challenges involve conflicts between equally valid but competing values that challenge right versus right. Such situations pose moral questions like those we address in this course.

In this course, we will focus on techniques for identifying and analyzing ethical issues and problems in mass communications.

PREREQUISITES:

2JM designation and ADV 3008, JOU 1001, PUR 3000 or RTV 3007 with minimum grade of C.

REQUISITE SKILLS FOR THIS COURSE:

In the course, students will:

1. **Manage Academic Responsibilities:** Use the Canvas online course management system to keep track of assignments and deadlines.
2. **Employ Analytical Skills:** Analyze and evaluate situations and content from lectures and readings.
3. **Communicate Clearly in Writing:** Express thoughts and ideas clearly in written assignments and online forums.
4. **Justify and Defend Perspectives:** Defend your own viewpoints and argue for opposing perspectives on ethical issues.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the semester, students should:

- 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.

REQUIRED BOOK:

Roberts, C. & Black, J. (2nd Edition) (2022). Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications. New York: Routledge. Full text availability at <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315174631/ethics-media-chris-roberts-jay-black>

Some additional readings may be required each week.

COURSE STRUCTURE:

The course will be a mix of lecture, discussion and workshops, with the focus on developing and conducting a team-led research study during the semester.

In terms of class sessions, workshops will generally be informal, but all members of the group will be expected to attend class and participate in the group activities for the day. Further, each member of the group will be asked to present the status of the project at different points in the semester, so all members of the group should always be aware of the status and progress of the project.

Assignments and Assignment Rubric**Formatting, Spelling and Grammar**

Each of your assignments should be written to the best of your ability. Because 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 Discussion Board Participation (25%)

Your contributions to online discussions are a major part of this course. Below is the rubric for online discussions.

	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 of the readings and online resources	Posts indicate a surface awareness of course readings and online resources	Posts do not indicate an understanding of course resources or of analytical understanding of the ethical reasoning process.
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.	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 has limited interaction with classmates.	Limited in the demonstration of meaningful interaction with classmates' posts.

Individual participation assessments will be posted after each module. Participation scores for each module will be weighted evenly. Combined they will account for 25% of your course grade. During the module for which your group leads the discussion, you will not be assessed on your individual response to prompts, but instead will be assessed on how your group leads and monitors the discussion (see next section).

Discussion-leading Project (20%)

At the end of the first week of class, you will be randomly assigned to a group of students who will lead the class discussion for one of the two-week modules during the semester. Your job is as follows. Groups will be randomly assigned by Thursday, September 5th.

Group Discussion Leader Tasks	Due Date
Connect with your group on Canvas and identify your assigned module by September 12th. (Group assignments will be made by September 6.)	Sept. 12th
Read the chapter for your week. Choose appropriate case/examples for discussion from the textbook.	At least one week before your discussion
E-mail discussion questions to instructor.	Thursday of the week before your discussion
Moderate/lead the in-class discussions.	<p>Normally Tuesday of the second module week. Discussion closes at 5 p.m. on second Thursday. Team presentation notes will be used as a supplement to peer research for the term paper. presentation deck for the class.</p> <p>Instructor will distribute peer evaluation forms to the presentation team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Evaluations are due by Tues of the module following the team presentation and conducting peer evals. <p>(Dates are slightly adjusted on weeks with holidays or breaks– see calendar.)</p>
Submit team presentation deck for the class to instructor (instructor will edit if needed and post the following week).	By 5 p.m. Friday of the team presentation week
Submit completed peer evaluation.	By 5 p.m. Tuesday <u>the week after</u> your module ends

Quizzes (20%)

Throughout the semester, you will have seven quizzes, each aligned with specific modules of the course. These quizzes will cover the material from the assigned readings and lectures for those modules. The purpose is to encourage you to stay current with your coursework. The quizzes will feature multiple-choice, short-answer, and matching questions. You can take a module quiz anytime from when the module opens until 5 p.m. on the Friday of the second week of that module. Each quiz is timed for 25 minutes. Once you start a quiz, you have one attempt to complete it within the allotted time. Your score will be recorded in the grade book and will be released at the end of the module.

You should complete the quizzes on your own without help from other students. While you can refer to your notes and textbooks, students who are well-prepared and know the material will perform significantly better than those who rely on looking up answers during the quiz. For details on when each quiz will be given, refer to the timeline below and the schedule posted on Canvas.

Quiz Schedule

Quiz 1	Open Aug 25 to Sept 5 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 2	Open Sept 8 to Sept 19 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 3	Open Sept 22 to Oct 3 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 4*	Open Oct 6 to Oct 16 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 5	Open Oct 20 to Oct 31 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 6	Open Nov 3 to Nov 14 at 5 p.m.
Quiz 7	Open Nov 17 to Dec 3 at 5 p.m.

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

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 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.

Each question (section) should be between 250 and 350 words, meaning the final, full submission should be between 1,500 and 2,100 words. As a guideline for length, each section of the paper should be about 1-2 pages double-spaced, for a total length of about 6-12 pages. Finally, each of the six sections should open with the respective question as the heading.

I. **Paper Development Process:**

1. **Paper topic submission:** In Module 3, you will write a description of the problem, an identification of the media practitioner(s) at the center of the dilemma, and your reason for choosing this topic. This amount of information will help you better prepare for the actual writing of the paper, and I will give you feedback on the content and direction of your assignment.
2. **Rough draft (Sections 1 to 3):** A draft paper of the first three sections is due with Module 4.
3. **Rough draft and peer review:** A draft of the final paper is due with Module 7. After you submit, Canvas will automatically assign you two of your classmates' papers to peer review. Essentially, your job with the Module 7 draft is to help one another through editing before submitting your final paper in Module 8, which I will edit and grade.

Your rough draft must be completely developed in order to take advantage of the feedback you will receive from your peers. If you miss the deadline, even by a few minutes, you will not be included in the peer-review process because Canvas automatically assigns peer reviewers only for those who submit by the deadline.

Of course, the more developed your draft is on that Friday, the better, but I strongly recommend you submit whatever draft you have at that time in any case. If you don't make the 5 p.m. deadline, there will be no option to submit late. Submission of your draft paper will count toward your *Other Participation* grade.

Please see the paper assignment on Canvas for the full grading rubric. Your final paper will be checked for plagiarism or improper attribution. Your final paper will be checked for plagiarism and improper attribution. The rubric for the paper is below, and you should use this to inform your decisions on how to write your paper and what information you should include. You can also see the point distribution on the assignment page in Canvas.

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.	Describes case. Focuses on perspective of organization or generic decision-maker working in media rather than identifiable individual. Applies concepts from class.	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.	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.
“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).	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.	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.
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Grammar, spelling and coherence.	Very well written and organized, especially clear and coherent. No grammar and 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).
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Meeting deadlines and quality of effort are important here to keep the course running smoothly. Sections that do not fall within the word requirements will receive a lower grade. You will also have points deducted from this assignment for missing or submitting late work for the deadlines mentioned in this section.

Other Participation (5%)

This includes assignments that will be tracked as complete/incomplete/late. Meeting deadlines and quality of effort are important here to keep the course running smoothly. For each one of these missed, one percentage point will be deducted. For example, if you miss turning in your paper topic by Module 2, but complete everything else well and on time, you would earn 4 participation points instead of 5.

- Update Canvas profile by 9/12
- Ethical analysis paper topic proposal due by end of Module 2
- Rough draft of ethical analysis paper due Friday of Module 6 at 5 p.m.
- Peer reviews of paper drafts due by end of Module 7 at 5 p.m.
- Final paper due on the last day of the semester at 5 p.m.

Student Learning Outcomes and Grading

	Understand principles and concepts	Recognize moral issues	Develop analytical skills to resolve dilemmas	Apply ethical reasoning across disciplines	Grade weight
Quizzes	✓	✓			20%
Online discussion participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	25%
Discussion-leading	✓	✓	✓	✓	20%
Analysis paper	✓	✓	✓		30%
Other deadlines & participation					5%
					100%

Final grade requirements

A	90-100
B+	87-89
B	80-86
C+	77-79
C	70-76
D+	67-69
D	60-66
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 (<https://policy.ufl.edu/policy/accessibility-and-reasonable-accommodation-for-individuals-with-disabilities/>) The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation 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-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. Occasionally, student groups will be asked to meet with the instructor via Zoom. Please See the course netiquette guidelines at https://dcp.ufl.edu/sbe/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2024/08/NetiquetteGuide_Zoom_LLC_Edition.pdf to prepare accordingly.

Getting Help

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- <https://elearning.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 1
- <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

****** 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.

UMatter, 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 352-294-CARE (2273). 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 encouraged to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <http://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two 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 at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

COURSE PROTOCOL

Assignments and Readings: All assignments must be turned in at the **BEGINNING** of class or earlier. No exceptions. All readings are to be completed before the start of lecture on the day assigned. Given the fluid nature of the research project, deadlines for assignments may be delayed depending upon circumstances. If a situation arises (personal or course-related) in which a student/group may need extra time for an assignment, the instructor must be informed IN ADVANCE and will determine the appropriate remedy. Extensions are they guaranteed. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Class Attendance/Participation: Students who miss class for excused absences (as defined by university policies at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationattendance.html>) must make arrangements with the professor IN ADVANCE of the absence. In addition to attendance, students must participate in discussions and add to the intellectual content of the course. Both criteria must be met to receive the full points of credit in this portion of the class.

Plagiarism; Cheating or other Academic Misconduct: The Academic Integrity Statement for the College of Journalism and Communications can be found here: <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/grad/forms/Plagiarism-Guideline.pdf>

In addition, all students are bound by the university's Honor Code Policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>. **Anyone who violates these policies in this course will receive a failing grade in this course and face further sanctions from the college and university.**

Special needs: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. *This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.*

Syllabus Changes: The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises. This includes the possibility of guest speakers and special presentations, some of which may be scheduled outside of class time. Note: Some of the content for this syllabus was taken from syllabi from previous classes.

Syllabus Disclaimer: Most of the content of this syllabus was borrowed from the template syllabus for the course.

Tips for getting good grades: Come to class on time. Submit your work on time as designated on the CANVAS schedule. Avoid “skipping” assignments. Burnout can be avoided with advanced planning for tackling the workload. When in class, set your cellphone to DND so that you can dedicate your full attention to the class discussion. Try to review the assigned course chapters/readings before class. Be an active, contributing participant during class and in group work.

Course Timeline

For a full list/calendar of deadlines, visit the syllabus page on Canvas.

Schedule	Book Chapters/Module Content	Assignments
Module 1	Introductions & syllabus Ethics & moral reasoning (Intro & Ch 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 1 discussion and responses Quiz 1
Module 2	Codes of ethics & justification models (Ch 2) Media traditions & the paradox of professionalism (Ch 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 2 discussion and responses Quiz 2 Topic for Ethical Analysis Paper
Module 3	Moral development & the expansion of empathy (Ch 4) Loyalty & diversity (Ch 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz 3 Writing Assignment: Stakeholders
Module 4	Personal & professional values (Ch 6) Truth & deception (Ch 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 4 discussion and responses Quiz 4 Ethical Analysis Paper (Sections 1–3)
Module 5	Privacy & public life (Ch 8) Persuasion & propaganda (Ch 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 5 discussion and responses Quiz 5 Writing Assignment: Truth & Privacy
Module 6	Consequentialism & utility (Ch 10) Deontology & moral rules (Ch 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 6 discussion and responses Quiz 6 Be working on Ethical Analysis Paper
Module 7	Virtue, justice & care (Ch 12) Accountability, transparency & credibility (Ch 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz 7 Ethical Analysis Paper draft and peer reviews

Module 8	Putting it all together 5 Ws & H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Analysis Paper final submission
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