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## MMC3203

# ETHICS & PROBLEMS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

## SYLLABUS, SPRING 2026

### OVERVIEW

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.

### 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.

### REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

Black, J., & Roberts, C. (2022). *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge.

### PREREQUISITES & REQUISITE SKILLS FOR THIS COURSE

Prerequisites for this course are: 2JM designation and ADV 3008, JOU 1001, PUR 3000 or RTV 3001 with minimum grade of C.

You should be prepared to:

- Manage academic responsibilities and meet deadlines on the Canvas online course management system.
- Employ analytical skills in the evaluation of situations and content presented in course lectures and readings.
- Articulate these thoughts and ideas clearly in writing, including online forums.
- Justify and defend your own perspectives as well as argue on behalf of perspectives that potentially run counter to your position about ethics situations.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course you will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of key principles and concepts of media ethics.
- Identify 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 different 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 various stakeholders.

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## INSTRUCTOR

DR. CAROL MORGAN

**Hi, I'm Dr. Carol Morgan, and I will be your professor this semester!**

I have been teaching communication classes for many years - both online and in the classroom. I received my Ph.D. in Communication Studies from the University of Nebraska, my M.A. in Media Studies from Northern Illinois University, and my B.S. in Advertising from the University of Illinois. I have taught many different kinds of communication classes through the years such as media criticism, business communication, interpersonal, small group, public speaking, interviewing, and more. I love what I do! I am passionate about communication, and I hope you are too!

On the personal side, I am married, and my husband Joe is a manager at St. Vincent DePaul. I have also two sons. Colton is 24 and is a math teacher and Chase is 22 and is a financial advisor.

I look forward to a great semester with all of you!

## CONTACT INFORMATION

- **Office Hours:** Virtual office hours are held online, by scheduled appointment only.
- **Messaging:** Use the [Canvas Inbox](#)[Links to an external site.](#) conversation tool to message your instructor.
- **Email:** [carolmorgan@ufledu](mailto:carolmorgan@ufledu)

Use Canvas mail and/or email ONLY for personal questions related to the course content or of a personal nature, such as grades, special circumstances, and needed accommodations. For technical issues, please see the "[Getting Help](#)" section below.

Expect a response within 48 hours. All online correspondence must have your full name in the message body, and contain your course and section number in the subject line.

If you have a question not specific to you, consult the [Course Questions Forum](#). It's likely that others have the same questions. Feel free to answer questions posted by your peers.

## GETTING HELP

If you encounter a technical issue, please contact [UF Computing Help Desk](#)[Links to an external site.](#), or utilize the one of the following self-help resources:

- [Video: Canvas Student Overview](#)[Links to an external site.](#) [7:04]
- [Which Browsers Does Canvas Support?](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- [How Can I Use Canvas on My Mobile Device?](#)
- [Canvas Student Guide](#)
- [Canvas Video Guide](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- [Mediasite Viewing Requirements](#)[Links to an external site.](#) - technical requirements for watching lecture videos.
- [Zoom Conferences Student Step-by-Step Guides](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- [Zoom: Creating, Recording, and Sharing](#)

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from the UF Computing Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST message your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

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## 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](#)[Links to an external site.](#) to check grammar rules
- [Citation Machine](#)[Links to an external site.](#) to assist with APA style source citing
- [Grammarly](#)[Links to an external site.](#) to act as an additional check of your spelling and grammar

### ONLINE DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION (26%)

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

Category ( <i>10 pts total</i> )	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.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (25%)

### Writing Prompts

In the semester, you will complete two writing assignments in which you will provide an in-depth analysis of a case study using what you learn in the course. The specific case studies, details, and rubrics are explained in Canvas. You will not use numbered lists, bullet points, or other types of unordered lists in these papers. Your papers will be checked for plagiarism or improper attribution.

### Peer Reviews

After you submit your papers, you will be assigned three peer reviews to complete. Please grade these to the best of your ability using the assignment rubric as your guide. You must have conducted your peer reviews by the deadline posted in Canvas.

## QUIZZES (14%)

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.

## 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 that 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?" or "What Do Philosophers Say?"** 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, with each section of the paper clearly labeled with the associated question as its heading.

Your completed paper should be 7-13 pages, double-spaced, margins on all sides not exceeding 1", in 12 point Calibri or Arial font. It should be saved as a Word (\*.doc, \*.docx) or PDF file. You will not use numbered lists, bullet points, or other types of unordered lists in these papers.

### Topic

Your paper topic is due during Module 2. You are required to record a video with a brief description of the problem, an identification of the media practitioner 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 be able to give you accurate feedback on the content and direction of your assignment before you fully commit to your topic.

### Draft: Sections 1-3

A draft paper of the first three sections is due early in the semester. At that time, Canvas will automatically assign each paper three peer reviewers (and each reviewer will be assigned three papers). If you miss the deadline, even by a few minutes, you will not be included in that process since the number of papers reviewed and the number of reviewers is exactly equal to the number of papers submitted at 11:59 p.m. on that day.

### Draft: All Sections

This draft paper is due toward the end of the semester. At that time, Canvas will automatically assign each paper three peer reviewers (and each reviewer will be assigned three papers). If you miss the deadline, even by a few minutes, you will not be included in that process since the number of papers reviewed and the number of reviewers is exactly equal to the number of papers submitted at 11:59 p.m. on that day.

Your rough draft must be completely developed in order to take advantage of the feedback you will receive from your peers. If you do not make the deadline, there will be no option to submit late.

### Peer Reviews

After you submit your draft papers, you will be assigned three peer reviews to complete. Please grade these to the best of your ability using the assignment rubric as your guide. All feedback that you give to your classmate will help them submit a more polished final paper. You must have conducted your peer reviews by the deadlines listed in Canvas.

## Final Draft

Your final paper must be submitted through Canvas at the end of the semester, where it will be checked for plagiarism or improper attribution. The rubric for the paper is below, and you should feel free to 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.

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/organization 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	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.



	development, empathy, and loyalty.		
"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?" Or "What Do Philosophers Say?"	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).



## GRADING SCALE

The final percentage points are translated into the letter grades as follows:

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

A score below 60 constitute a failing grade. If you noticed a scoring error, please notify the instructor within one week the error was made. No issues regarding scoring will be reviewed beyond this one week period, or after midnight of the last day of the examination week, whichever comes first.

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## LATE SUBMISSION POLICY

Unless you notify the instructor in advance and have a documented reason for why you cannot complete an assignment in a timely way, and with the exception of factors listed on the [UF Attendance Policy websiteLinks to an external site.](#), make-ups and late submissions on homework, exams, and quizzes will not be accepted.

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## STUDENT FEEDBACK SURVEYS

Students might be asked to complete two surveys to give feedback to the instructor regarding the elements of this course. These surveys are anonymous and are a way for you to provide honest feedback on the course. This feedback is essential to provide the best quality instruction and give you, the learner, the best learning experience. You are asked to give your honest opinion and to share any advice you have to make the course better. You will be asked questions regarding the instructor presence, lectures, assignment quality, etc.

You may be graded for your participation in the survey, not for your answers, as the survey is anonymous. The survey may act as a prerequisite for the final module and require completion before moving forward.

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## UF POLICIES

### POLICY ON ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource CenterLinks to an external site.](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation

letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

The instructor should be notified of any special accommodations required by the student when they begin their course.

## UF COUNSELING SERVICES

Resources are available on campus for students having personal problems or lacking a clear career and academic goals which interfere with their academic performance. These resources include:

- [UF Counseling & Wellness CenterLinks to an external site.](#), 301 Peabody Hall, 352-392-1575, personal and career counseling
- [UF Student Health Care CenterLinks to an external site.](#)
  - Student Mental Health, 352-392-1171, personal counseling
  - Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), 352-392-1161, sexual counseling
- [U Matter We CareLinks to an external site.](#)
- [https://career.ufl.edu/Links to an external site.](https://career.ufl.edu/), Reitz Union, 352-392-1601, career development assistance and counseling

## UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

UF students are bound by [The Honor PledgeLinks to an external site.](#) which states: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The [Honor CodeLinks to an external site.](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

From [Regulations of the University of Florida, 4.041 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code: Scope and ViolationsLinks to an external site.](#):

**Plagiarism.** A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.

2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student."

From [Regulations of the University of Florida, 6C1-4.047 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code: Sanctions](#)[Links to an external site.](#):

For a violation or violations of the Honor Code, a student may receive any of the sanctions that can be imposed for Student Conduct Code violations, including but not limited to conduct probation, suspension and expulsion as well as any educational sanctions. In addition, students may receive the following:

1. Assignment grade penalty. The student is assigned a grade penalty on an assignment including but not limited to a zero.
2. Course grade penalty. The student is assigned a grade penalty in the entire course including but not limited to an 'E'."

## COURSE EVALUATION

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals.

Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at the [GatorEvals](#)[Links to an external site.](#) website. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via the [GatorEvals portal](#)[Links to an external site.](#). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students on the [GatorEvals Public Data](#)[Links to an external site.](#) website.