

MMC 3203, Ethics and Problems in Mass Communications

Spring 2015

Class time: Tuesday, 1:55-2:45 p.m.; Thursday, 12:50-2:45 p.m.¹
Place: Weimer Hall 1092
Professor: Tom Kelleher
Contact: tkell@jou.ufl.edu, Weimer Hall 2088, 392-4046
Office hours: Monday, 9 a.m.-noon; Thursday, 3-4 p.m.; by appt.

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 right from wrong—what you're supposed to do versus what you're not supposed to do. From introductory principles courses (e.g., ADV 3008, JOU 1001, PUR 3000, RTV 3007) to *Law of Mass Communication* (MMC 4200), students learn what they should and should not do as matters of professional practice and legal responsibility. But 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 course 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 3007 with minimum grade of C.

Resources

Canvas

<https://lss.at.ufl.edu>

Required Textbook

Black, J., & Roberts, C. (2011). *Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge.

¹ The course will meet in Weimer 1092 on Tuesdays, but we will work online in lieu of face-to-face meetings on Thursdays. Please still keep Thursdays at 12:50 p.m. available for real-time online quizzes and tests. See course timeline and Canvas for details.

Requisite Skills for this Course

You should be prepared to 1) manage academic responsibilities and meet deadlines both in class and on the Canvas online course management system, 2) articulate ideas in verbal and written communication, including online forums, 3) employ analytical skills in the evaluation of situations and content presented in course lectures and readings and 4) justify/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.
- Apply ethical reasoning standards across multiple mass communication disciplines.

Expectations and Assignments

Exams (2 @ 15% each)

Two exams will cover material from assigned readings, online articles, audio/video materials, online discussion and student-presented information including synopses of group-led discussions. Exams will include multiple-choice, matching, true/false and essay questions.

You will have only one opportunity to take each exam during a specified two-hour time period. Please see the timeline at the bottom of this syllabus and the calendar on Canvas, and check your calendars to make sure you have access to an online computer and no scheduling conflicts during the exam times. **THERE ARE NO MAKE-UP EXAMS** without proper documentation explaining your inability to take the exam on a particular day, which must be provided before the scheduled date if at all possible.

Each exam will have a time limit. You can take the exam any time during the two-hour window, but you will have only the allotted amount of time (e.g., 30 minutes) to complete the exam 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 **MUCH** better than those who try to look everything up as they go. Trying to retrieve information from the Web while logged on to the testing system may cause technical problems leading to the cancellation of your exam attempt.

Taking each exam must be an individual effort. Since the exams are online, we'll demand academic honesty through a combination of the honor system and technical checks.

Online Discussion Participation (20%)

Your contributions to online discussions will count here. Attached is the general rubric for online discussions. This may be modified as we go. Students who lead weekly class discussions will use the rubric on Canvas to evaluate their peers confidentially. The professor will then take these peer evaluations into account when assigning participation grades. Participation assessments will be posted mid-term (10%) and at the end of the semester (10%).

In-class Attendance and Participation (10%)

Attendance and preparation for face-to-face meetings on Tuesdays will be just as important as online participation. Your participation in class should reflect your reading and preparation. Notice that weekly readings are required prior to face-to-face class time on Tuesdays.

In case of absence due to an emergency such as a death in family or a serious illness, you must notify the professor and provide appropriate documentation within a week after first missing class. Excuses for planned absences must be submitted in writing and must be approved one week in advance of the missed class period. One unexcused absence will mean two percentage points off for attendance for the semester, two unexcused absences will mean four percentage points off, etc. Being late (arriving after attendance is taken) or leaving early without an acceptable excuse or advance approval will equal one tardy. Being late or leaving early twice will equal one unexcused absence. For example, a student who is late once (1%) and absent once (2%) would only be able to earn 7% of the 10% possible for in-class participation for the semester.

Engaging in distracting behavior—especially e-mail, Facebook, texting etc.—will hurt your participation grade in the same way that being late will hurt your attendance grade.

Discussion-leading Project (20%)

You will have the opportunity to lead the online class discussion for one week during the semester. Your job for that week is as follows.

- Read the assigned readings for your assigned module as soon as you get a chance.
- Develop a discussion prompt based on the readings, and provide a related case study, article, or video that you find to use as a springboard for discussion. E-mail your prompt to the professor by Thursday prior to your week.
- Make sure you post your initial question(s) by Sunday at 5 p.m.
- Monitor and lead the class discussion between Tuesday and Thursday. Discussions will close on Thursday at 5 p.m.
- Complete a confidential peer discussion rubric for each classmate and submit it to professor. The professor will take these peer evaluations into account when assigning discussion participation grades.
- Write a synopsis and post it to Canvas by the following Tuesday at 5 p.m.

Task	Due Date
Sign up for a week to host discussion.	January 15
Read the chapter for your week. Choose appropriate case/example for discussion.	At least one week before your discussion
E-mail discussion question(s) to professor.	12:50 p.m. Thursday (the week before your discussion)
Post initial discussion question(s).	5 p.m. Sunday

Moderate/lead the online discussion.	Monday-Thursday (discussion closes at 5 p.m. on Thursday)
Submit completed peer discussion rubrics to professor.	5 p.m. on Tuesday following discussion
Submit synopsis to professor (professor will edit if needed and post)	5 p.m. Tuesday following discussion

The professor will write the synopsis for the first two weeks' discussion as a model. For grading of student synopses, the attached rubric will apply as a guide (with possible fine-tuning on Canvas).

Analysis Paper (20%)

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. (One option is to attach a published blog, article, case study, or news story 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.

I recommend thinking of your paper topic near the beginning of the semester so that you can think through the questions as they come up for discussion during the semester. You might then be able to draft sections of the paper as we go.

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
Exams	✓		✓		30% (2 @ 15%)
Online discussion participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	20% (2 @ 10%)
In-class attendance	✓		✓	✓	20%
Discussion-leading	✓	✓	✓		20%
Analysis paper	✓	✓	✓		20%
					100%

Final grade requirements

A = 90-100

B = 80-89.9

C = 70-79.9

D = 60-69.9

F = 59.9 and below

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 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 <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>.

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. The university netiquette guide for online courses will be discussed during the first week: <http://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf>.

Getting Help

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

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- <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.

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

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.

Tentative Course Timeline

	General Topic	Assignments Due
Week 1	Introductions and discussion of course expectations, netiquette, assignments and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to course resources by 1/6 • Update Canvas profile by 1/7 • Read text intro (pp. 1-14) by 1/8 • Self introductions on Canvas by 1/8
Week 2	Ethics and moral reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 1 by 1/13 • Online discussion of Chapter 1 1/13-1/15 • Practice quiz between 12:50 and 2:50 p.m. on Thursday, 1/15.
Week 3	Codes of ethics and justification models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 2 by 1/20 • Online discussion of Chapter 2 1/20-1/22
Week 4	Media traditions and the paradox of professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 3 by 1/27 • Online discussion of Chapter 3 1/27-1/29
Week 5	Moral development and the expansion of empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 4 by 2/3 • Online discussion of Chapter 4 2/3-2/5
Week 6	Loyalty and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 5 by 2/10 • Online discussion of Chapter 5 2/10-2/12
Week 7	Personal and professional values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 6 by 2/17 • Online discussion of Chapter 6 2/17-2/19
Week 8	Truth and deception Exam 1, midterm participation assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 7 by 2/24 • Exam 1 between 12:50 and 2:50 p.m. on Thursday, 2/26
<i>Spring Break</i>		
Week 9	Privacy and public life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 8 by 3/10 • Online discussion of Chapter 8 3/10-3/12
Week 10	Persuasion and propaganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 9 by 3/17 • Online discussion of Chapter 9

		3/17-3/19
Week 11	Consequentialism and utility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 10 by 3/24 • Online discussion of Chapter 10 3/24-3/26
Week 12	Deontology and moral rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 11 by 3/31 • Online discussion of Chapter 11 3/31-4/2
Week 13	Virtue, justice and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 12 by 4/7 • Online discussion of Chapter 12 4/7-4/9
Week 14	Accountability, transparency and credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to audio summary and read Chapter 13 by 4/14 • Online discussion of Chapter 13 4/14-4/16
Week 15	Putting it all together 5 Ws and H Final participation assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final paper due 4/21
Exam week	Final exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final exam period between 10 a.m. and noon on Thursday, 4/30

Rubric for Weekly Discussion Participation

	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 sustain dialogue	Posts were thoughtful and provocative.	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 somewhat relevant to discussion prompts or course content.
Clarity and coherence	Very well written and organized, especially clear and coherent.	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.

Rubric for Discussion-leading Assignment

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Discussion prompt	Question(s) address a central issue of the chapter with well-matched resource to spark engaging discussion that aids deeper understanding.	Clear question(s) with added resource (case study, news story, anecdote, online video, etc.) relevant to chapter. Added resource helps discussion.	Question(s) relevant to chapter. Question(s) may be vague or difficult to answer in a way that encourages further discussion.
Discussion moderation	Consistent and tactful (not overbearing) participation that kept conversation on topic and moving along as necessary.	Consistent participation.	Inconsistent participation.
Meaningful connections in synopsis	Synopsis concisely and accurately summarizes key points, identifies meaningful categories, and would serve as an excellent study guide for exams.	Synopsis clearly and concisely summarizes key points.	Synopsis is either a sparse outline or dense narrative of weekly discussion.
Grammar, spelling and coherence of synopsis	Very well written and organized.	Generally well written and organized with few spelling/grammatical errors.	Unclearly written or organized.
Meets deadlines	Met all deadlines.	Deadline issues due to understandable but avoidable circumstances.	Did not meet deadlines.

Rubric for Ethical Analysis Paper

Briefly but clearly describes the case, what makes it a moral dilemma and the specific ethical question to be answered.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Identifies applicable precedents, guidelines, codes or laws. Explains if they can't resolve dilemma.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Identifies stakeholders and the impact the decision is likely to have on each in the short term and in the long term.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Prioritizes values—both moral and non-moral—and indicates which one(s) won't be compromised.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Explains which school of philosophy or set of moral principles provides the moral compass.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
States clear conclusion and articulates consideration of what friends and other respected people will think about decision-making.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Grammar, spelling and coherence.	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement