Problems & Ethics in Mass Communication
MMC 3203 – Summer 2024

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NOTE: The following information WILL be useful to you – but only IF you take the time to read it.

<u>Objectives</u>: You may find this surprising, but this is, in many ways, a <u>skills</u> course. The purpose of the course is to introduce students to some ethical issues communications professionals are likely to encounter. But even more than that, the course is designed to teach students <u>systematic processes for making decisions</u> about those dilemmas, as well as grounding the discussion in the classical ethical philosophies that underlie such decision-making.

This course is <u>not</u> designed to give you a list of rules for ethical behavior. Rather, it is intended to give you practice in thinking about how to identify and resolve the kinds of ethical problems you will face as a communications professional. It also will provide you with some tools for making better decisions.

Through the class, students will learn to:
- Identify ethical dilemmas in communication, including determining how to anticipate and consider different stakeholders' perspectives on those dilemmas
- Engage in critical thinking to identify and describe a variety of alternative responses to communication ethics problems
- Use an ethical decision-making model and critical thinking skills to reason through communication ethics dilemmas
- Assess and describe the ethical justifiability of possible alternative responses in terms of the communicator's duty and/or the reasonable predictable consequences of those responses
- Make and justify decisions about which responses are most ethically sound

Success in the class is *not* based on whether you're a good person or whether I believe you're a good person. I assume that you're <u>all</u> good people. To do well in the class, you must learn a set of concepts and skills and demonstrate your ability to <u>apply them</u> appropriately to new situations and new sets of facts. In other words, MMC 3203 is pretty much like any other course you've taken, except that it should prompt you to do more thinking about your own values and beliefs.

<u>Readings:</u> There is no required text for the course. However, there ARE assigned readings, all of which will be made available for you to download before we leave for London/Greece. I've also pre-recorded most all of the lecture videos, so that we can spend class time in discussion. **Make certain you have the readings and videos with you in some form** because there's no guarantee you'll have decent/free Internet access while we're in London/Greece. I strongly recommend downloading everything from the DropBox folder I'll set up to a jump drive, your laptop, or some other storage medium.

<u>Class Participation:</u> Class participation is <u>required.</u> That means you'll be expected to show up for class **having watched the lecture video and read the assigned readings.** To receive class participation credit, you must participate <u>actively</u> in the discussion, including listening carefully to your classmates and to me. You also will be expected to demonstrate that you're thinking about the issues by asking questions, offering your own opinions and justifications for those opinions during class discussions, which will account for the bulk of class time.

In addition to being physically present in class, I expect you to be **<u>mentally</u>** present. **That means you will *not* be texting, emailing or using your laptop or phone to Web-surf, work on assignments for another class or interact with any social networking site during class time. Unless there's a specific need for someone in the class to get online, leave your laptop closed during class. I know many of you are convinced you're great at multi-tasking. You're not.**

Here's the bottom line: Coming to class is required on Study Abroad, so simply showing up will ***not*** earn you class participation points. To receive participation points, you must participate.

<u>Values Analysis:</u> The first assignment will require you to complete a Values Inventory and write a short paper (e.g. 3-4 pages) discussing how the values you've ranked highest (most important) have influenced your decision-making in the past. You can do this in a sort of general way, or you can describe an ethical dilemma you've encountered in the past and how your value priorities affected the way you dealt with that dilemma and perhaps whether you remain satisfied with your decision. This need not be a communications-related dilemma, but if you've had an internship or other professional experience in which you've confronted an ethical challenge, I'd encourage you to use this memo to think through what you did and what your choice says about your values. This is a graded assignment, but I won't be judging your decision – only <u>the depth of your reasoning</u> about it. Remember – ethical dilemmas involve <u>choosing between two or more alternatives that *could* be ethically justifiable</u>, so please don't write about situations that were clearly right vs. wrong situations [e.g., turning in a plagiarized assignment, cheating on a test, lying to your boss (or parents or roommate or professor, etc., etc.) to keep yourself out of trouble, shoplifting or any other criminal activity – you get the picture].

<u>Lightning Quizzes:</u> Sadly, some students don't read the assigned readings or watch the videos unless there's some incentive, and that means people come to class unprepared. So each time we meet, we'll begin the class with a 5-minute quiz. It will include no more than 5 questions, often fewer, drawn directly from the readings and/or the lecture video. The point here is to make sure we're all on the same page so that we can focus class time on discussion. If you arrive late to class, you will <u>not</u> be allowed to make up the quiz.

<u>Ethics Decision Memos</u>: To give you a chance to practice applying ethical reasoning to situations you may encounter or hear/read about – and to help you prepare for real-world ethical decision-making – you will be required to turn in three ethics memos – one for the first submission, two for the second submission. For each memo, you'll be required to explain *briefly* what options are available to the communications professional(s) involved in the case and to offer an ethics-based justification for the course of action you believe the professional(s) should take. Your grade will depend <u>on the quality of your analysis</u> of the situation and your rationale – not whether or not I happen to agree with your recommendation. Yes, of course the quality of your writing counts – this is, after all, a Journalism & Communications college course. <u>Each memo should be typed, double-spaced and no more than 2 pages long. Longer does not necessarily mean better. Ideally, you will be able to cover the key points succinctly.</u> I'd prefer to have these printed, if possible, but if we don't have access to a printer, you can submit them electronically.

<u>Group Project: Develop a Code of Ethics:</u> As CJC Dean Hub Brown is fond of saying, UF's job is not to train people to be good employees. Instead, our goal should be to help students develop the knowledge and skills to be good employ<u>ers. </u>In other words, you should leave UF prepared to do a great job as an entry-level employee in your chosen industry, but *also* with a mind-set that will make you a leader in that industry once you've gained sufficient experience. For this assignment, you will work in groups of three or four to come up with a code of ethics for a hypothetical media organization. This organization might be an advertising or public relations agency, a news organization of some kind, a media production company, a political campaign's media department, etc. Your group will develop and submit a code of ethics for your organization that will include a mission statement for the organization, a brief description of the types of ethical problems you believe (based on research) that organization might be most likely to encounter, and a set of ethical principles employees will be required to follow. Your Code of Ethics certainly can draw on established codes of ethics for organizations like the Society of Professional Journalists, the Radio Television Digital News Association, the Public Relations Society of America, etc. However, you may not simply "adopt" any of those organizations' codes as your own; at the very least, you would need to explain how the key tenets of the broader organization's codes will apply in the specific situations your start-up will likely encounter.

Because we're in London/Greece, I want each group to assume that its organization would work – at the least – in the United States and London/Greece. Thus, a section of your final paper will address whether and how working in two cultures would influence your ethics code and/or the types of practices that might be considered ethically problematic/acceptable. Once your group has decided on the type of media organization for which you're developing the ethics code, each team member should interview at least two residents of London/Greece about how they view the ethical standards of those types of media in London/Greece. (For example, do British/Greek people view most British/Greek journalists as behaving ethically? Do British/Greek people perceive advertising practitioners to be ethical? What ethical lapses do your interviewees see as most problematic within that media industry in London/Greece?) You will be required to provide a list of all the people your team members interviewed, with names, a brief description of how and when you encountered each person, the interviewees' occupations, contact information (email), etc.

Team members will submit anonymous evaluations of everyone's work, and those who do not seem to have contributed their fair share will receive a lower grade than the overall group grade. More

detailed instruction will be provided in a separate document. The paper will be due by Friday, June 9, but some of your group members may not return to Florida with the rest of us. Because you need to conduct interviews in London/Greece and you ALL need to be involved with the final writing and editing, <u>do not wait</u> until you return to the United States to start on it. The days after we return should be for polishing the project, not writing it.

Grading: Grades will be determined as follows:

Values analysis	100 points
Decision memo 1 (1 memo)	100 points
Decision memo 2 (two memos)	200 points
Lightning quizzes	150 points
Group project: Design your ethics code	250 points
Class participation	200 points
Total possible	**1,000 points**

I use minus grades so that individuals who do superior work receive GPA points reflecting that accomplishment. Final grades will be based on these break-points:

A- = 90-93.5%	A = 93.6%+	
B- = 80-83.5%	B=83.6-87%	B+=87.1%-89.9%
C-= 70-73.5%	C=73.6-77%	C+=77.1%-79.9%
D-= 60-63.5%	D=63.6-67%	D+=67.1%-69.9%
E = 59.9% or lower		

It is possible, though unlikely, that the grades will be curved. You can check how letter grades relate to grade points assigned at this website.

Accommodation for disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation for a disability must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student, who will bring a copy of this documentation to me. If you do have a disability that requires accommodation, <u>please</u> do not hesitate to request it, *even if you don't believe you'll need it* during the course of this class.

A note about inclusiveness: The topics we will deal with in this class are sometimes intellectually and emotionally challenging. If people weren't likely to disagree about how the situations should be resolved, they wouldn't be ethical dilemmas. So I expect rigorous debate and disagreement in class discussions. I encourage you to have the courage to speak up when you disagree, particularly if you believe the discussion is ignoring or leaving out underheard perspectives or making assumptions that aren't accurate for all groups of people. It isn't just that people who might have these rarely spoken perspectives need to be heard; it's that those who share more mainstream perspectives need to hear them.

Throughout the class, I will do my best to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity, including gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated, so please let me know if you have suggestions for improving the course for you personally or for other student groups.

<u>Academic honesty Issues:</u>   For heaven's sake, this is an ETHICS course, so I shouldn't even have to mention this. See this page for a reminder and explanation of what UF's honor code requires. **If you aren't certain** that what you're contemplating doing is OK, it probably isn't. There is only ONE person who can tell you whether *I* consider something to be academic dishonesty – and that's **me**. Do <u>not</u> trust another student or any other professor to know what will be acceptable in my class. (This is good advice for any class.) For your sake and mine, ask questions; don't assume.

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Zero Tolerance Policy
for academic honesty violations

Plagiarism and fabricating information have become serious problems – and an embarrassment to the communications professions. In most instances, those caught plagiarizing or fabricating information have been fired. I expect you to behave professionally in your work for this class. Therefore, if I determine that you've plagiarized information or that you've fabricated information (i.e. interviews for the final paper) for your work in this class,

you'll fail the *class*,

not just the assignment. In addition, I will report the violation to the Student Conduct office.

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SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS FOR SUMMER 2023

Unless there's some other indication, the readings will be available through the course Canvas e-learning site and/or through a DropBox folder to which I will provide the link. Download everything before we leave for London/Greece – there's no guarantee you'll always have decent/cheap Internet access while we're there.

<p style="color:red; text-align:center;">Dates and reading assignments have not yet been updated. At least 2 classes will meet before we leave the United States.</p>

Class/Date	**Topic(s)**	**Readings/Videos** **(to be completed *before* class)**
Before first class	Introduction & context, go over syllabus & assignments; Differences between British/Greek & U.S. media systems	Video lecture: Introduction
Class 1/May 11	Values & relativism – why can't we ALL be right?	Video lecture: Values & Relativism Ethics Unwrapped videos: Moral relativism & All is Not Relative Elliott, "All is not relative" Due: Values analysis (PRINTED, please)

Class 2/May 11	Moral development	Video lecture: Moral Development Kohlberg & Gilligan compilation
Classes 3 & 4/ May 15 & 16	Ethical approaches and ethical reasoning	Video lectures: 4 Components of Ethical Behavior, Duty- & Consequences-based Reasoning BBC Ethics Guide. Read the sections on duty-based ethics and on consequentialism: Plaisance, "Ethics Theory Overview"
Class 5/May 17	Truth-telling	Video lectures: Truth-telling; Working Through Ethical Dilemmas Bok, Chapter 7, "Truthfulness, deceit and trust" Truth in Advertising, "Most Deceptive Ads of 2022" Granger, "Out for a spin: The difference between twisting the truth and telling it" Shafer, "Is it ever OK for journalists to lie?"
Class 6/May 19	Conflicts of interest	Video lecture: Conflict of Interest PRSSA, Conflicts of interest: What to do when the decision is not clean-cut; Moritz: "What Happens to Sports Media When Everyone's a Gambler?" CJR: "Guide to Native Advertising - Executive Summary," "Native Advertising and Journalism," "Native Advertising & News Readers" DUE: 1st ethics decision memo
Class 7/May 23	Media & politics	Video lecture: Media & Politics Ripley, "Complicating the narratives" Ortutay & Seitz, "How microtargeted political ads are wreaking havoc on our elections" Ordway & Wihbey, "Negative political ads and their effect on voters: Updated collection of research" Brookings Institute, "How tech platforms fuel U.S. political polarization and what government can do about it" Pew Research Center, "Fact Sheet: News Media & Political Attitudes in Italy"
Class 8/May 24	Privacy, entertainment, exploitation	Video lecture: Privacy McFarland, "Why we care about privacy" Dukehart, "What it feels like to be photographed in a moment of grief" Engelberg, "Balancing the public interest and a family's grief" Cline, "Ethics and reality TV: Should we really watch?" Conick, The ethics of targeting minorities with dark ads
Class 9/May 26	Graphic reality and violent entertainment	Video lecture: Media & violence Vincent, "An Ethics Report Card: 3 Dilemmas for News Coverage of Mass Shootings"

		Lewis, "How newsrooms handle graphic images of violence" PBS, "Firearms industry scrutinized for how it markets to consumers" Kain, "The truth about video games and gun violence" Fried, "War makes social media an ethical minefield"
Class 10/May 30	Race, religion & other diversity issues	Video lecture: Race, religion & diversity Color of Change, "Normalizing injustice" -- Focus on the sections of the report called "Key findings at a glance" and "Recommendations" Bailey, "How implicit bias works in journalism" Cords, "'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle': The long history of racism in advertising" Shahin, "How social media -- aided by bots -- amplifies Islamophobia online" Gardner, "GLAAD: Broadcast TV Now Features Record Number of LGBTQ Characters" DUE: 2nd media ethics decision memos
June 9		DUE: Group Project – Ethics Code, plus peer evaluations