

Journalism and Media Ethics

2021 Spring | JOUR 480 | Online

Instructor: Yayu Feng, Ph.D.

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Virtual Office Hour: By appointments (calendly.com/yayufeng/office-hour)

Main Textbook:

Christians, C. G., Fackler, M., Richardson, K. B., & Kreshel, P. (2020). *Media ethics: Cases and moral reasoning*. 11th Edition. Routledge.

Class Schedule

This course is delivered online, with mostly synchronous zoom meetings. Asynchronous class sessions are marked “no zoom meeting” in the schedule. During these sessions, you will be completing assignments on your own.

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments	Notes
Getting started			
2/1	Introduction	Getting to know each other and the class	Pre-work on canvas
2/3		Patterson, “How to read case studies” Elliott, “Cases and moral systems”	
Module I: The Foundation of Ethics			
2/8	Ethical theories	Read “Introduction”: pp. 14-32	
2/10		Plaisance, “ <i>Harm</i> ”	
Module II: Moral Development			
2/15	Moral identity	Coleman and Wilkins, “Moral development: A psychological approach to understanding moral decision making”	
2/17		Reflection activity #1: Your Ethical Ideology	No Zoom Meeting
2/22	Moral reasoning and decision-making	Read “Introduction”: pp. 1-13 (Potter Box)	MEMO#1 Due
2/23		Plaisance, “The Concept of Moral Ecology in Media Sociology Research” Guest Speaker: Patrick Plaisance, on Moral Ecology	Evening Guest Lecture

Module III: Institutional Codes			
3/1	Institutional Pressure	Chapter 1: "Institutional Pressure"	
3/3	Codes of ethics	Read codes of ethics, links available on canvas Group Assignment: Compare Codes of Ethics	
Module IV: Loyalty and Duty			
3/8	Loyalty and Social Responsibilities	Craft and Davis, "What do journalists owe us?"	MEMO#2 Due
3/10		Chapter 13: "The Demands of Social Responsibility"	
Module V: Truth-telling			
3/15	Understanding truth	Patterson et al., "Information ethics: A profession seeks the truth" Chapter 2: "Truth-telling"	
3/17		Chapter 11: "Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings"	
3/22	Truth and objectivity	1. Ward, "Truth and objectivity" 2. Glasser, "When is objective reporting irresponsible reporting?"	Written Ethical Profile Due
3/24		Movie Break: "Good Night, and Good Luck" Profile Presentation sign up	

SPRING BREAK!

4/7	Profile Presentation		
Module VI: Right to Privacy			
4/19	Privacy in digital world	"Privacy: Looking for solitude in the global village"	
4/21		Chapter 5: "Privacy"	
Module VII: Independence and Public Trust			
4/12	Conflicts of Interests and Trust	Chapter 12: "Conflicting Loyalties"	
4/14		Chapter 8: The Media are Commercial Schudson, "The Fall, Rise and Fall of Media Trust"	

Module 8: Stereotypes, Diversity, Social Justice			
4/26	Stereotype and diversity	Gorham, "Stereotypes" Woods, " <i>Talking across differences</i> "	
4/28	Social justice	Chapter 4: "Social Justice"	
Module 9: Visual Ethics			
5/3	Visuals in Advertising	Chapter 7: "Advertising in an Image-Based Media Culture"	
5/5	Photojournalism Ethics	Wilkins et al., "Picture this: The ethics of photo and video journalism"	
Module 10: Censorship			
5/10	Censorship	1. Tedford and Herbeck, " <i>Prior Restraint</i> " 2. Columbia Journalism Review, "21 st Century Censorship" 3. Chapter 17: "Censorship"	
5/12		Canvas: Reflection activity #2	No Zoom Meeting

Check your individual essay due dates on Canvas!

Final case analysis due by 5 pm, May 20.

Course Description

This course examines ethical issues in various fields of communication, including news, advertising, public relations, interpersonal communication and entertainment media (primarily books, film and recorded music). We consider ethical issues using various ideas (the Golden Mean, for example) and various roles (people who work in communications, people who read magazines). Specifically, we address these characteristics:

Moral sensitivity and imagination. We learn to recognize ethical issues in communications, to imagine ways to resolve these issues and to envision how the resolution of issues affects other people.

Analytical skills. We apply specific ethical theories to the issues we recognize, and we make those applications in a principled and defensible manner.

Understanding you as a moral agent. We recognize our ethical responsibilities, whether we are reporters, advertising copywriters, public relations specialists or anyone who acts as a media consumer. We think about how to resolve inner conflicts between professional values and personal ones. We think about what we want to stand for, or against.

Tolerance for conflicting views. Each of us is an autonomous moral agent, and each of us has differing ethical values. Undoubtedly, these differing values collide. We use our moral sensitivity and analytical skills to try to understand why colleagues hold differing views and to discern whether these views are defensible. We can reject a view, but not the holder of the view. We are polite. We are civil. We can agree to disagree.

In this class, we will talk about the foundations of ethics, consider specific decision-making strategies, discuss recurring ethical issues and new challenges in media professions, and practice with lots of real cases. The class will allow you to question and critique the conventional wisdom of the professions and, therefore, offer you a way to help change and improve it.

Course Objective

- 1) Gaining factual knowledge of the ethics issues in communication industries
- 2) Learning fundamental principles of communication ethics
- 3) Learning how to find and use resources to answer research questions (papers, exam)
- 4) Developing creative capacities in writing (ethical profile, reflection activities, essays, analytical paper) and presentation (profile presentation)

Overview of Graded Assignments:

1. Quizzes (10 pts each, 100 in total)

Throughout the semester, you will be given 10 quizzes in total, 1 per each module. **Quizzes cover current events, lectures, the readings.** You will take these quizzes on Canvas.

2. “Dilemma of the Week” Essays (20 pts each, 60 pts in total)

You will write **three short essays** (400 words), which are meant to connect the readings to real-life media performance. It allows you to demonstrate your understanding of the reading material and your ability to detect and describe ethical issues. You will sign up for **three topics from modules III to X** to write your essays. You will write about **a current example** involving a question of media ethics relating to the topic of the module you signed up for. This could come from a variety of sources including stories you know about from your media consumption or your own work, or articles or social media contents. In the essay, you should: 1) summarize the case; 2) identify the ethical issue(s) involved and discuss it **in relation to the reading materials**; 3) comment on the media organizations’ or professionals’ performance in dealing with the issue.

3. Canvas activities (70pts in total)

You will finish two reflection activities—one at the beginning and the other at the end of the course—based on the prompts provided through Canvas. They are worth 15 points each, and are meant for you to reflect on the course materials, and how your moral thinking and perspectives about ethics evolved. You will also finish a group project “Comparing Codes of Ethics” during module III, worth 30 points, and an online discussion during Module 7, worth 10 points. More details about these activities to be found on Canvas.

4. Ethical profile (75 pts)

This project lets you demonstrate individual information-gathering and analytical skills in relation to a specific career in communication ethics. It will result in a 1,250-word, double-spaced paper and a 5-to-8-minute oral presentation to the class. A detailed description of this assignment will be distributed later.

5. Case analysis (100 pts)

This project lets you demonstrate individual information-gathering and analytical skills in relation to a specific case in communication ethics. It is worth 100 points and will result in a 2,500-word typed, double-spaced paper. A detailed description of this assignment will be distributed later.

6. Attendance and Participation (25 pts)

This is a small seminar-style course directed toward students who are prepared and invested. We'll work hard to build a learning community that taps into each student's level of knowledge, expertise, and interest. Therefore, attendance is crucial for the success of everyone enrolled. I will keep attendance and keep track of who's with us in the zoom meetings. **Students may miss two classes—for any reason—without penalty.** On the third absence, the student's final grade will be lowered by one letter. On the fourth absence, the final grade will be lowered another letter. **Students cannot miss more than four classes and still pass the course.**

This is a senior seminar. That means we will have much discussion and exchange of ideas. The assigned readings will be done beforehand; students will be called on to participate in discussions. Be prepared to answer questions in class. Your engagement in this seminar is important and contributes to its success, especially now that our class is to be held online. You contribute to the course by doing the following often, consistently and with a genuinely positive attitude: Sharing thought-provoking, relevant comments and questions during class meetings, being a positive participant and leader in small-group activities, contributing to the discussion forum thoughtfully and responding to your peers politely.

Communication

Zoom meetings: Most of our class sessions will be zoom meetings. Please make sure to join the meetings on time, have your name displayed, and never leave early. I will hold office hour by appointments on zoom as well, and you are welcome to schedule one-on-one meetings with me through this link: <https://calendly.com/yayufeng/office-hour>. If you have any difficulties with zoom, please let me know as soon as possible.

Electronic Communication: Please email me if you have any questions or concerns. Faculty members cannot resolve problems if they don't know about them. Students are encouraged to share concerns with their professor.

Canvas: Information and reading materials you need for this course are available on the Canvas site, please use it wisely.

Academic integrity

Plagiarized work will not be accepted and will incur significant penalties in accordance with University policies. You may not use the ideas, words or research of others, without proper crediting and citation. By turning in materials for review, you certify that all work presented is your own and has been done by you independently, or as a member of a designated group for group assignments.

Grading:

The Final Grade Consists of:

1. Participation: 25 pts
 2. Quizzes: 70 pts
 3. Essays: 60 pts
 4. Canvas assignments: 70 pts
 5. Ethical profile: 75 pts
 6. Case analysis: 100 pts
- Total: 400 points

Grade	Percent
A	≥ 93%
A-	≥ 90%
B+	≥ 87%
B	≥ 83%
B-	≥ 80%
C+	≥ 77%
C	≥ 73%
C-	≥ 70%
D+	≥ 67%
D	≥ 63%
D-	≥ 60%
F	Below 60%

Deadlines: Deadlines will be strictly adhered to. **Quizzes must be taken during the specified time. No late or make-up quizzes.** For assignments, late work is lowered 10% of the grade per day. Any questions regarding graded assignments should be raised and discussed within 2 weeks of their posted dates.

Accommodations

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Academic accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities including

but not limited to mental health diagnoses, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, Autism, chronic medical conditions, visual, mobility, and hearing disabilities. Students are invited to contact the Disability Resources office about accommodations early in the semester. Appointments can be made by calling 651-962-6315 or in person in Murray-Herrick, Room 110. For further information, you can locate the Disability Resources office on the web at <http://www.stthomas.edu/enhancementprog/>.

Some Helpful Tips:

1. Read a major news source—such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, BBC, NPR, CNN—daily. **There will be one question about current news in each quiz.** I also recommend you to regularly visit professional websites such as the Columbia Journalism Review, iMediaethics, or Poynter’s Media Wire to follow professional comments on current events and discussion of ethics-related issues. Doing so will also help you to find ideas for your essays.
2. Attend class meetings on time and don’t leave early.
3. Participate in the class discussion by:
 - Paying attention during lectures and making comments/asking questions/responding to fellow students’ comments
 - Commenting on the class readings and/or relating them to the topics in class.
 - Bringing up current events topics and ethics-related issues.
 - Relating your media consumption to the topics we’re studying.
4. Read assigned materials before class.
5. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and voice your opinions.
6. Come to my office hours when things are unclear. I am here to help you learn ☺