Communication 367: Ethical Problems in Mass Communication

Fall 2019 Room: 148 Fell Hall T/R 2-3:15 p.m.

**Instructor:** K. Megan Hopper, Ph.D.

**Office:** 454 Fell Hall

**Email:** khopper@ilstu.edu

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30-4:30 p.m. Other hours by appointment.

**REQUIRED TEXT:**

*Ethical Problems in Mass Media* (2019)*.* K.M. Hopper (ed.). San Diego, CA: Cognella Publishing.

Available for purchase at: <https://store.cognella.com/82946-1A-001>

You will also be responsible for any **readings and web links posted on our course ReggieNet site.**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is designed to facilitate your application of ethical principles to situations you will encounter in the real world as media professionals. Throughout the course of the semester, you will learn to identify a range of ethical issues present in professional situations. Through critical thinking and analysis, you will practice navigating the difficult choices and the ethical consequences associated with those choices that often face professionals in the fields of journalism, political communication, advertising, public relations, and entertainment.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Recognize major ethical frameworks and be able to apply them to situations that

are often present in the media profession.

2. Employ the analytical steps involved in creative ethical analysis.

3. Identify the guiding principles and standards that media professionals adhere to.

4. Explore your existing ethical beliefs and how they may relate to your critical

analysis of ethical problems in the mass communication profession.

5. More purposefully and critically consume media with a deeper ethical awareness.

6. Make socially responsible decisions and justify them ethically.

7. Argue your position on ethical issues in a professional and civil manner.

8. Develop and apply your own code of ethics.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

You are expected to come to each class having read the assigned readings, and always feel well prepared to participate in class discussions and activities. Late work is accepted, but will be penalized. **No assignments will be accepted via email**.

**Case Analyses:** You will be required to find, describe, and analyze 3 current mass communication controversies with ethical implications in the News, Advertising, and Public Relations fields using the analytical tools learned in class. Details of the assignments and examples of high quality case analyses for each unit are posted under Resources on ReggieNet.

**Entertainment Case Study Discussion:** You will be required to find a current entertainment media-related controversy with ethical implications, present a thorough description of the controversy, and engage your fellow classmates in an in-class discussion. A written, one-page summary of your case and analysis using the Potter Box will be handed in to the instructor.

**Media Ethics Film Critique Group Project:** Groups of approximately 5-6 students will work together to examine how various media values and ethical principles may or may not be at work as portrayed in a major motion picture. Groups will choose a film from a provided list and watch the selected film together, analyzing the film’s story, characters, and content in terms of what they demonstrate about media ethics in relation to our class discussion and course readings. Each group will then share their findings through a written report and a presentation to the rest of the class.

**Participation:** This course is **NOT** primarily lecture based. Rather, it is set up to foster meaningful discussions during each class meeting. Therefore, your regular attendance and participation in discussion are essential to your success. In addition, as part of your participation grade, you will be required to complete, type, and hand in your answers to the discussion questions that appear at the end of each unit in our textbook. Due dates for the completed discussion questions are listed in the course schedule at the end of this syllabus.

**Personal Code of Ethics:** Based upon the readings and discussion you have been exposed to throughout this course, you will prepare a code of ethics outlining your own personal standards for professional, ethical conduct.

**Policies for Graduate Students:** In addition to the course assignments (evaluated using standards appropriate for graduate level work), graduate students will be responsible for a fourth written case analysis focusing on a controversy approved by the instructor. Graduate students will also be expected to complete an expanded case study synopsis paper that critically evaluates and summarizes the four cases analyzed throughout the semester as a whole.

**Detailed instructions for out-of-class assignments will be posted on ReggieNet.**

**Criteria for evaluation:**

50 pts News Case Analysis

50 pts Advertising Case Analysis

50 pts PR Case Analysis

20 pts Entertainment Case Study Discussion

100 pts Film Critique Group Project

80 pts Participation & Discussion Question Answers

50 pts Personal Code of Ethics\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

400 pts Total

### GENERAL NOTES ON CLASS POLICIES:

**Attendance:** Three unexcused absences will result in a letter grade deduction in course grade. Tardiness is also frowned upon. Your active participation during in-class discussions and completion of in-class writing assignments make up a substantial portion of your grade. Therefore, if you miss class, you will miss out on those points.

**Respect:** Please be kind and courteous to every one and respect diverse viewpoints.

**Using Technology in Class:** During class, computers should be used for in-class assignments and note-taking only. This means no checking email, Facebook, Cubs scores, etc. during class. Likewise, **texting or other use of mobile phones/devices is prohibited during class. You will be specifically assessed on how frequently you use your mobile device for non-class activities in your participation self-evaluations.**

**Using technology in such a manner will negatively impact your final grade in the course.**

**Academic Dishonesty**

The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences, that range from probation to expulsion. If you are unsure about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quotes or collaborations, ask me. Plagiarism will result in a zero grade for the assignment, and you will be reported to the Office of the Provost.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

**Extra Credit Opportunities:**

There will be a few extra credit opportunities for research participation. The extra credit points will be added to your final grade, and may not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity. There are no guarantees for extra credit, and it is each student’s responsibility to be aware of and take advantage of such opportunities. **ONE** such opportunity is through participating in any **ONE** of the studies in the School of Communication’s Research Study Announcement Board. The research board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the board and be aware of available opportunities. The Research Board can be accessed via:  <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>

In general, each 30 minutes of participation in an extra credit study will earn you .5 Research Credits, but please see the call for participants for the Research Credits associated with each study. Each Research Credit is worth an additional 5 points toward your total possible final grade in this course. For example, if you participate in a research study worth .5 Research Credit, your participation would provide 5 points to your final grade. Each project listed on the Research Announcement Board will indicate the specific number of Research Credits associated with the project. The course instructor will get evidence of participation and the time of participation from the researcher(s) who administer the research studies at the conclusion of the semester; however, it is your responsibility to make sure that the researchers have the necessary evidence of your participation at the time of the study. Before participating in a study, please be sure to have your name, ULID (i.e., the part of your email before @ilstu.edu), instructor name, and course and section number ready, as you will need to provide these to receive credit. Research Credit can only be applied to one course for each study, unless specified otherwise on the Research Announcement Board. After the final week of classes there will be no further opportunities for extra credit or to otherwise improve your grade.

There may be some studies for which you are not eligible (e.g., recruiting based on gender or family structure) or in which you do not wish to take part. Reasonable alternatives are available for those not able or wanting to take part in specific studies, to ensure equitable non-research based opportunities.  For each available study in which you would like to complete an alternate assignment, please contact the instructor, who will assign a journal from which to identify and provide an annotated bibliography to the researcher consistent with the description on the Alternate Opportunities page (<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/home/students/alternates>) of the Board. You must complete and submit the research report to the researcher before the date the study closes--late submissions are not accepted.  Alternate opportunities will be scaled by the course instructor to ensure commensurate time commitment and course credit with the research-based opportunity.

**Tentative Class Schedule:** I reserve the right to change the schedule as necessary.

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| **WEEK** | **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READING/ASSIGNMENT** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **1** | TUE. 8/20 | Orientation  Ethical Foundations | Course Syllabus & Text Preface & Introduction |
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|  | THU. 8/22 | Foundations & Perspectives | Text Introduction  **FORM GROUPS** |
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| **2** | TUE. 8/27 | Applying Ethical Principles | Text Introduction |
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|  | THU. 8/29 | News: Can Journalism & Ethics Co-exist? | Text pp. 43-55 |
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| **3** | TUE. 9/3 | News: Truthtelling | Text pp. 57-66 |
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|  | THU. 9/5 | News: Social Justice | Text pp. 67-74 |
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| **4** | TUE. 9/10 | News: Reporters & Sources  &  Invasion of Privacy | Right of Privacy Primer & Reporters & Sources on ReggieNet |
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|  | THU. 9/12 | News: Journalism & War | Text pp. 75-94  &  Pros & Cons of Embedded Journalism on ReggieNet |
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| **5** | TUE. 9/17 | Political Communication: Objectivity & Political Authority | Bennett reading posted on ReggieNet  **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON P. 95 OF TEXT DUE** |
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|  | THU. 9/19 | Political Communication: Fake News | Text pp. 99-119  &  *Taking Sides* reading posted on ReggieNet |
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| **WEEK** | **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READING/ASSIGNMENT** |
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| **6** | TUE. 9/24 | Advertising: Persuasion & the Commercialization of Everyday Life | Text pp. 123-146  **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON P. 120 OF TEXT DUE** |
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|  | THU. 9/26 | Advertising: Truthtelling & Image-Based Culture | Text pp. 147-158  **NEWS CASE ANALYSIS DUE** |
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| **7** | TUE. 10/1 | Advertising: Can Advertising be Ethical? | Text pp. 159-188  **GROUP PROJECT ASSIGNED** |
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|  | THU. 10/3 | **NO CLASS –**  **GROUP MEETING** | **NO CLASS** |
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| **8** | TUE. 10/8 | Public Relations: Public Communication | **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON P. 189 OF TEXT DUE** |
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|  | THU. 10/10 | Public Relations: Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings | Text pp. 193-200  **ADVERTISING CASE ANALYSIS DUE** |
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| **9** | TUE. 10/15 | Public Relations: The Demands of Social Responsibility | Text pp. 201-206 |
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|  | THU. 10/17 | Public Relations: Can PR be ethical? | Text pp. 207-222 |
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| **10** | TUE. 10/22 | Entertainment: For the People or For Profit? | Text pp. 227-230  **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON P. 223 DUE** |
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|  | THU. 10/24 | Entertainment: Violence | Text pp. 231-241  **PUBLIC RELATIONS CASE ANALYSIS DUE** |
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| **WEEK** | **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **READING/ASSIGNMENT** |
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| **11** | TUE. 10/29 | Entertainment: Exploitation on Reality TV | Text pp. 243-257 |
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|  | THU. 10/31 | Entertainment: Stereotypes on Reality TV | Text pp. 269-283 |
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| **12** | TUE. 11/5 | Entertainment: Censorship | Text pp. 259-268 |
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|  | THU. 11/7 | Entertainment: Representation | Potter reading posted on ReggieNet  **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON P. 284 DUE** |
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| **13** | TUE. 11/12 | **NO CLASS –**  **GROUP MEETING** |  |
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|  | THU. 11/14 | **NO CLASS –**  **GROUP MEETING** |  |
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| **14** | TUE. 11/19 | Entertainment: Current Case Studies | **ENTERTAINMENT CASE STUDY DISCUSSIONS** |
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|  | THU. 11/21 | Entertainment: Current Case Studies | **PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS DUE** |
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| **15** | 11/25-29 | **NO CLASS -**  **THANKSGIVING BREAK** |  |
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| **16** | TUE. 12/3 | Group Film Critique Presentations |  |
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|  | THU. 12/5 | Group Film Critique Presentations | **GROUP FINAL PAPERS DUE** |
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| **17** | 12/9-13 | **FINALS WEEK – NO CLASS** |  |