

Communications 310

Mass Media Ethics

Fall 2009, Wednesday evening class

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., Thursday 1:30 to 2:30 and by appointment

Note: Please put "Comm 310" in the subject line of any e-mail you send me.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The mass media in the United States are very influential. They are in large part responsible for what we think about, whom we vote for, what movies we see and even how we dress and what we eat. Ethical members of the media understand this power and strive to avoid misusing it, either intentionally or unintentionally. People working in the media must maintain the highest ethical standards in order to be fair and avoid unnecessary harm.

This course is the study of professional conduct within various communications contexts. Student will examine ethical principles and situations involving advertising; Internet, print and broadcast journalism; the entertainment industry; photojournalism; public relations; and the World Wide Web.

The goals of this course are twofold:

1. to help students who will be working in the mass media recognize and deal with the ethical pitfalls they may encounter, and
2. to make everyone better media consumers so they can better analyze and evaluate media messages to determine their veracity and fairness.

TEXTS AND TOOLS

- "Media Ethics" 6th Edition, by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins (McGraw Hill: 2008).
- A computer with Internet access.
- Access to daily news reports.

COURSE PROCEDURES

Class time will be divided between lectures and student-led discussions. Students assigned to write case studies will discuss the studies and turn in their writing assignment the week after we discuss the chapter in class. I will lead that conversation.

For example, I will discuss ethical issues involving loyalties and conflicts of interest on Feb. 16, the week we are scheduled to discuss that topic. Students will turn in papers and discuss the case studies on Feb. 23. These students will be expected to explain the case studies, the micro and macro issues involved and how they would resolve them.

Web sites

My Web site (<http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/tclanin>) contains employment and internship information; reference materials for ethics, grammar, word usage and other topics; and a link to this course. You will find the ethics link useful for researching your writing assignments. The Comm 310 Web site (<http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/tclanin/Comm310/Comm310.html>) includes class announcements, assignments, lecture materials, handouts and grades. I urge you to check the Web site once or twice a week for announcements and to ensure that you have been given proper credit for your work.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Grades are based on writing assignments, class participation and two tests. Grades are determined by:

Two tests	450 points
Three commentaries.....	300 points
Class participation.....	150 point
Attendance	50 points
Quizzes.....	50 points
Total	1,000 points

Semester letter grade

985 to 1,000 points = A+	700 to 784 points = C
900 to 984 points = A	685 to 699 points = D+
885 to 899 points = B+	600 to 685 points = D
800 to 884 points = B	less than 600 points = F
785 to 799 points = C+	

Grading criteria

The tests and case studies are essays and are graded on the following criteria:

A grade of D: The paper is written in the first person (i.e., you used the word, “I”). The writer used the word “you” rather than “one” or “people” or whatever noun is appropriate in the context of the paragraph. The paper is mostly opinion with little evidence to support that opinion. The argument was not framed using the philosophies and decision-making tools discussed in class. The writer does, however, show a little knowledge of what s/he is writing about.

A grade of C: The arguments in the paper are framed using the philosophies and decision-making tools discussed in class, but the paper does not convince me that the writer understands

these philosophies and tools; the reasoning is muddled. Also, the writing skills are weak, and the paper contains numerous grammatical and word-usage errors.

A grade of B: The arguments are well framed using the philosophies and decision-making tools discussed, and the writer has demonstrated that s/he understands what s/he is writing about. The writing skills are weak, however, and the paper contains numerous grammatical and word-usage errors.

A grade of A: The arguments are framed in terms of the philosophies and decision-making processes discussed in class. The writer has made it clear that s/he understand s/he is talking about when referring the philosophies and decision-making processes discussed. It is written in a clear and concise manner with few grammatical problems.

Do not write in the first person or second person (don't use *I, we, our, you, your* etc.) Do not write *I believe* or *I think*. State what you know in framing your arguments.

Use correct grammar.

Incorrect: By supporting the cause through *their* project, GAP is making a statement but at the expense of the victims.

GAP is one entity, Use singular pronouns to refer it.

Correct: By supporting the cause through *its* project, GAP is making a statement but at the expense of the victims.

The Writing Center on campus can help you fine-tune your papers.

Here are some Web sites that can you with your grammar:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html>

<http://www.aliscot.com/bigdog/>

<http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~russial/grammar/grambo.html#thetest>

http://www.geocities.com/gene_moutoux/diagrams.htm

<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html> (Be sure to scroll down.)

Tests: Both tests will be essays analyzing and resolving ethical issues in the mass media. The format will be very similar to the commentaries. Tests will be written in class in Blue Books. (I prefer the larger format.) Or you may use a laptop computer and turn in your test either by e-mail or transfer it to my computer via a flash drive.

Be aware that illegible handwriting will count against you.

I do not allow makeup tests without prior arrangement. You must contact me within 24 hours if you did not make it to class because of an emergency.

Commentaries: You will be assigned to write three two-page commentaries based on the case studies at the end of the chapters or provided elsewhere. Your commentaries must articulate the ethical issues at stake and your position on the issues based on the ethical principles and other decision-making tools discussed in class. Each of your commentaries should address these questions:

1. What are the ethical issues at stake?
2. What is the ethical choice/action and why?
3. If applicable, did the people involved make the right decision?

Sample commentaries are posted on the course Web site.

Commentaries are due the at end of the class. I will not accept late commentary assignments.

Writing assignment comments

These notes on your papers indicate a problem in writing structure:

aw - awkward or unclear sentence

tr - transition problem

gr - other grammar problem

sp - spelling problem

np - noun-pronoun or pronoun-pronoun agreement

stet - never mind; ignore the edit or the comment

pun - punctuation problem

wu - word usage

Class participation: We will be discussing the assigned chapter case studies each week. I expect everyone to have read the case studies and to be ready to discuss each case study. Your grade will be based on whether you are prepared to discuss a case study.

Attendance: Repeated absences will affect the quality of your work and your grade. Points will be determined by the number absences:

Absences	Points	Absences	Points	Absences	Points	Absences	Points
0-3	100	6	80	9	60	12	30
4	90	7	75	10	50	13	20
5	85	8	70	11	40	14	10

You will not lose points if you had a legitimate reason for missing class. Please let me know if you have to miss class because of job conflicts, family emergencies, religious holidays, health problems etc. as soon as possible. I will not reinstate points if you wait until the end of the semester to give me your excuses.

Quizzes: You will have short quizzes on that week's reading assignment at the start of class each Tuesday. You may not take the quiz later if you are late for class or miss class.

Extra credit: There are no opportunities for extra credit in class.

However, you do have the opportunity to improve you overall grade on commentaries and class participation. You may write one additional commentary to replace a commentary you have already turned in the hope of getting a better grade on the new assignment. The additional commentary must be from the chapter we are discussing that week.

You may also improve your class participation grade by actively participating in a session not assigned to you. I can't promise to remember all your names and faces. Let me know at the start of class if you want that day's class participation to replace an earlier participation grade.

SOME OTHER THOUGHTS

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is taking even one sentence or sentence fragment from another document, including from a Web site, and using it word-for-word or nearly word-for-word without citing the source. Plagiarism is theft. It is unethical and evil. Students caught committing plagiarism on any writing assignment will be dismissed from the class and will receive a F grade for the semester. The student also will be reported to the dean of students.

If you have any questions about avoiding plagiarism, consult *Student Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism: How to Write an effective Research Paper*. A link to the document is on the course Web site.

Academic accommodations: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability should notify me as soon as possible. You can obtain the necessary papers in UH101 if you need to take the examination at Disabled Student Services. The phone number is 657-278-2408.

Emergency instructions: In case of fire or earthquake or other emergency, follow my instructions.

Classroom civility. Students disrupt the class when they walk in late, use cell phones, visit with students or take frequent breaks during class. Please show respect to your fellow students and the instructor.

Contribute to the class discussion. It is in your best interest to participate in the class. Your comments and questions help you understand what we are talking about. It also reduces the amount of time I lecture, which means you have to take fewer notes.

Visit me in my office. Let me get to know you and learn what you expect to get from this course. Don't wait until the end of the semester – or worse yet, after the semester ends – to talk to me about problems you are having. I have little sympathy for people who come to me at the end of the semester begging for mercy.

