

Communication^N

ETHICS

www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins

COMM 431
Fall Semester 2010
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Office hours: 9:30-11 a.m.
Tuesday and Thursday, and by
appointment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

People on the receiving end of mass communication apparently do not think the media are very ethical. Polls consistently show people believe journalists, advertising people and public relations practitioners to be around the bottom of the pile in ethical behavior.

Yet central to credibility of media, whether it be television news, movies, newspapers, internet, advertisements, or political publicity is the question of ethics. Answers don't come easy, but by the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- understand principal theories of ethics as described by philosophers ancient and modern;
- recognize ethical issues in communication case studies;
- apply critical skills of reason and analysis to ethical problems;
- tolerate disagreement and ambiguity in ethical considerations.

Most important of these is the third; without a method of critical analysis, ethics discussion too easily falls into an exchange of mere opinion leading nowhere.

Required text: Judith A. Boss, *Ethics For Life*. 5th ed.

PROJECTS AND EXAMINATIONS

Grading weights may be broken into the numbers presented below, reflecting highest possible points.

- Mid-semester exam, 150 pts.
- Final exam, 300 pts.
- Term paper, 200 pts.
- Other assignments, 100 pts.
- Total: 750 pts.

The total number may change slightly, depending on eventual number of assignments completed. Standard grade percentages:

- 90-100=A
- 80-89=B
- 70-79=C
- 60-69=D
- Below 60=F

CLASS POLICIES

Attendance: Roll will not be taken. As adults, you have the freedom to decide whether it is ethically defensible to skip lectures! Keep in mind, however, that, one, lectures are seldom text-based, but instead supplement material presented in the text; two, your presence during class discussions is a necessary supplement to your weekly assignments. In-class exercises will also be given from time to time.

Make-ups: If you skip, you cannot make up the in-class work! Late work for out-of-class assignments will be accepted, but the grade will suffer, the later, the lower. Communications practitioners live in a world of tight deadlines and quick decisions. We want to at least try to reflect that pressure in class.

But you're only a student, you say? Okay, how about this: skip one class session, and at the end of the semester, I'll drop the F from any in-class work missed. Think of this as a "bank account" for when you're sick, your car's sick, or your sense of motivation is sick. Out-of-class assignments will still be due, however.

Grades received will not be discussed in class, to preserve confidentiality. If you have questions or complaints, drop by during office hours.

Official Notices

If you need special accommodations for learning or have special needs, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Work in this course must adhere to the NDSU Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct. This addresses cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating dishonesty. Instructors have the right to respond to a student's dishonesty by failing the student for the particular assignment or test, or even the entire course, or recommend the student drop the course.

Instructor's web page: www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins. Choose Classes link to access the class web site.



COMMUNICATION ETHICS

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE, FALL SEMESTER 2010

Week One (Aug. 23-27)

Introduction, ethical relativism, movie, "Ethics in America." Readings: Boss, Chapter 1.

Week Two (Aug. 30-Sept. 1)

Major ethics systems, history.

Readings: Boss, Chapters 2 and 7.

Week Three (Sept. 6-10)

The ethics formula: a way to find answers.

(Introduction to an ethics worksheet.)

Readings: Boss, Chapters 3 and 8.

Week Four (Sept. 13-17)

Making decisions using an ethics worksheet.

Readings: Boss, Chapters 4 and 9.

Week Five (Sept. 20-24)

Codes of ethics.

Readings: As assigned in class.

Week Six (Sept. 27-Oct. 1)

The right to be left alone. (Privacy issues.). Present term paper assignment.

Readings: Boss, Chapter 5.

Week Seven (Oct. 4-8; No class Thursday, Oct. 7, instructor at convention.)

Continue privacy issues.

Readings: As assigned in class.

Week Eight (Oct. 11-15)

Confidentiality.

Readings: As assigned in class.

Thursday, Oct. 14: Midterm exam.

Week Nine (Oct. 18-22)

Ethics, schmethics, think of the money. (Economics and responsibility.)

Readings: As assigned in class.

Week Ten (Oct. 25-29):

Stereotypes.

Readings: Boss, Chapter 6.

Week Eleven (Nov. 1-5)

And justice for all. (Media and social issues.)

Readings: As assigned in class.

Week Twelve (Nov. 8-12)

Ethics and advertising. Readings: As assigned in class.

Week Thirteen (Nov. 15-19)

Obscenity.

Readings: Boss, Chapter 10.

Week Fourteen (Nov. 22-26)

The juvenile audience.

Readings: Boss, Chapter 11, Afterword.

Week Fifteen (Nov. 29-Dec. 1)

Ethics and popular culture, media in corporate society. Review for final.

Week Sixteen (Dec. 6-10, "dead week")

Final lectures, exam review.

Note: Other readings will be assigned as appropriate.

Term paper is due ON or BEFORE Friday, Dec. 10.

Final exam: 10:30-12:30. Monday, Dec. 13.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Mortimer J. Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978, pp. 100-126.

Clifford G. Christians, Kim B. Rotzoll, & Mark Fackler, *Media Ethics. Cases and Moral Reasoning*. 2nd ed. New York and London: Longman, 1987.

Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *The Philosophy of Kant*. New York: The Modern Library, 1949, pp. 140-208.

H. Eugene Goodwin, *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1983.

Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1941, pp. 928-1112.

James M. Smith and Ernest Sosa, eds., *Mill's Utilitarianism*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1969.

W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

