

Communication^N • • • **ETHICS**

www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins

COMM 431
Spring Semester 2006
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Tuesday and Thursday, and by
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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, 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 texts: Leslie, Larry Z. (2004). *Mass Communication Ethics: Decision Making in Postmodern Culture*. Houghton-Mifflin.

Johannesen, Richard, L. (2002). *Ethics in Human Communication*. Waveland Press.

PROJECTS AND EXAMINATIONS

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

- Mid-semester exam, 150 pts.
- Final exam, 250 pts.
- Final paper, 300 pts.
- Other assignments, 125 pts.
- Total: 825 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. The site includes this syllabus, lecture synopses, other class handouts and resources, a student roster, announcements page and class bulletin board.



COMMUNICATION ETHICS

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE, SPRING SEMESTER 2006

Week One (Jan 9-13)

Introduction, ethical relativism, movie, "Ethics in America." Readings: Leslie, Chapter 1. (Richard readings will be assigned in class.)

Week Two (Jan 16-20)

Major ethics systems, history.
Readings: Leslie, Chapters 3-4.

Week Three (Jan. 23-27)

The ethics formula: a way to find answers.
(Introduction to ethics worksheet.)

Readings: Leslie, Chapter 2.

Week Four Jan. 30-Feb. 3)

Making decisions using ethics worksheet.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 5.

Week Five (Feb. 6-10)

Codes of ethics.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 6.

WeekSix (Feb. 13-17)

The right to be left alone. (Privacy issues.). Present term paper assignment.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 7.

Week Seven (Feb. 20-24)

Continue, privacy issues.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 8-9.

Week Eight (Feb. 27-March 3)

Confidentiality.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 10 (case studies for class discussion may be chosen from this section).
Midterm exam.

Week Nine (March 6-10)

Ethics, schmethics, think of the money. (Economics and responsibility.)
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 12.

Week Ten (March 20-24; March 13-17 is spring break, no classes):

Stereotypes.

Readings: Leslie, Chapter 13.

Week Eleven (March 27-31)

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

Week Twelve (April 3-7)

Ethics and advertising. Readings: Leslie, Chapter 11.

Week Thirteen (April 10-14)

Obscenity.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 14.

Week Fourteen (April 17-21)

The juvenile audience.
Readings: Leslie, Chapter 15.

Week Fifteen (April 24-28)

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

Week Sixteen (May 1-5)

Final lectures, exam review.

Term paper is due ON or BEFORE Friday, May 5, 4:30 p.m.

Final exam: 1 p.m. Wednesday, May 10.

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.

