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J4800 Media Ethics & Society

Syllabus: Fall 2009

CRN: 83268 ~ Room: 430 Sparks ~ Time: Tues & Thurs 2:30 – 3:45

Disclaimer: The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." – Martin Luther King, Jr.
"Universal compassion is the only guarantee of morality." – Arthur Schopenhauer

Instructor Information:

Dr. Carrie Packwood Freeman

Assistant Professor of Communication

Email: cpfreeman@gsu.edu Office Phone: 404-413-5736

Office Location: 1023 (10th Floor) One Park Place

My office inbox/mailbox is located in the Communication Dept office 662 One Park Place.

Office Hours: After class Thursday if requested, or by appointment (Mon-Thursday afternoons). During the workweek, I can usually respond to email daily. Please email me only from your GSU email account (or through ULearn) as opposed to personal email accounts.

Text:

- Day, Louis Alvin. (2006). *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*. 5th Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Other readings and all assignments will be posted on ULearn. Check it often.

Course Description:

The media play a fundamental role in constructing and maintaining our culture and values, and therefore have an ethical obligation to society. In this class, we will engage the topic of media ethics to discover the major macro (social) and micro (personal) issues facing journalism, public relations, advertising, and the entertainment media in the twenty-first century. To analyze these issues, we will discuss major ethical theories as well as practice using the ethical decision-making process. Our goal is to make more thoughtful and socially responsible choices as media practitioners and/or consumers to create a win/win situation for society, our professions, and ourselves.



Course Objectives & Goals:

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Recognize the important ways the media impact society (the media's roles, power, and influence)
- Identify major ethical opportunities the media have to increase benefits and decrease harm to society and certain groups or individuals.
- Identify the moral claimants in any decision-making process.
- Evaluate ethical issues using an ethical decision-making process.
- Explain the main ethical theories and their application to major media issues.
- Identify "red flag" issues and behaviors to avoid as a media practitioner.
- Describe the professional ethical guidelines/codes for your chosen media field.
- Think critically and evaluate the ethicality of choices made by media industries, practitioners, audiences, and regulators.
- Research and analyze a specific media ethics case and write an in-depth research paper on the topic, with editing input and guidance from your professor.
- Identify ethical guidelines, theories, and a decision-making process that you plan to use moving forward.

My goals are for you to:

- Recognize major ethical issues in your chosen profession so you can be prepared to either address them in ways that fit with your values or adapt your career course to find the best fit. *Be true to yourself and your values!*
- Question the ethicality of current media content, practices, and structures, seek alternatives that better serve the public interest and live up to professional ideals, and actively pursue those solutions. *Question the status quo and work to improve society!*
- Feel a sense of responsibility in your role as a mass communicator to "do the right thing" for society, and not just you and your company. *Have noble intentions!*
- Start your career by living your ideals and being a role model, so you will stand out in your field and your community. *Behave admirably so you can leave a legacy you can be proud of!*
- Recognize your unique potential to make a difference in the world – through the media and otherwise. *Be extraordinary!*

What course objectives or goals do you have for yourself?

Let him that would move the world, first move himself. – Socrates

Be the change you want to see in the world. – Mahatma Gandhi

Expectations:

I pledge the following TO YOU and the class:

- To provide a productive, interesting, and interactive learning environment.
- To maintain a secure, welcoming atmosphere in which to express your beliefs and ideas.
- To respect you as an intelligent individual.
- To assume the best of you.
- To be open and responsive to your feedback.
- To give my time and attention to you to help you make the course meaningful and to enhance your writing.
- To provide opportunities for you to personalize the course to meet your goals/interests.
- To be enthusiastic toward the subject matter and your learning.
- To provide a variety of current resources, materials, and speakers.
- To communicate clearly about assignments and my expectations.
- To maintain a sense of humor and keep things interesting.

I expect the following FROM YOU regarding your participation:

I have high expectations for your thoughtful engagement with the class and material. I am not going to do much lecturing, and I will often expect class time to be used for discussion – that means you should do the readings and think critically about the issues *ahead of time* in order to be able to meaningfully contribute. When we break into smaller groups for class exercises, I expect you will make use of the time to stay on track with the assignment. This is not a class which you can skip often or just sit back and expect to regurgitate a textbook come test time. It relies on your constant oral and written participation and philosophical engagement. This is a communications department at a major public university, so we will live up to those standards. I appreciate you being attentive and on time.

All participation is not created equal. I most respect participation that is thoughtful, relevant, and professional (not that it rules out humor) and allows for everyone to get an equal chance to speak. Participation is not just about sharing your thoughts with everyone but being willing to actively listen to others and learn from their different perspectives.

Additionally, since this is an ethics class, we will often be discussing issues which are value-related, sensitive and political. Because we are not avoiding controversy, something we see or hear may end up offending each one of us at some point. When/if this happens, let us know and tell us why (these are teachable moments). And in order for everyone to feel comfortable sharing their feelings, we should agree to be respectful of others' differences. This means not making your responses personal (directed at someone) and avoiding demeaning or discriminatory remarks. As Stephen Covey says in the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "seek first to understand, then to be understood."

An ethics class is meant to push you beyond your comfort zone to consider a diversity of perspectives and the big picture. Be prepared to open your mind and think critically, not just about other's ideas but

also about your own. I want you to feel like you have grown personally and professionally during this class.

If ever you have suggestions for how the class could be improved or you could feel more comfortable participating (or if you have any documented disabilities I can help accommodate), please come and see me to share your thoughts. Additionally, the communication department has its own undergraduate advising office (6th floor One Park Place) that is there to provide confidential help and support, so please also consult them if you are struggling or considering withdrawal.

Coursework and Evaluation:

Your final course grade is based on the following:

- 15% Quality Participation**
- 40% Final Paper**
- 10% Literature Review**
- 10% Ethical Case Analysis**
- 10% Presentation**
- 15% Final Exam**

FINAL GRADE SCALE:

This is how your final percentage score at the end of the term equates to a letter grade.

100 – 97 = A+	96 – 93 = A	92 – 90 = A-
89 – 87 = B +	86 – 83 = B	82 – 80 = B-
79 – 77 = C+	76 – 73 = C	72 – 70 = C-
69 – 67 = D+	66 – 63 = D	62 – 60 = D-

Let's not think about anything less...

PARTICIPATION (15%):

This is a highly discussion-oriented class, and participation is an important part of making the class meaningful for everyone. Participation is factored in based on how attentive and engaged you are in class (individually and in groups) and how willing you are to participate productively (respectfully, professionally, and appropriately) and to actively listen and respond to others. To earn an A, your participation should demonstrate that you are prepared for class and have been engaging thoughtfully with the ideas from the readings and lectures (as opposed to just sharing spur-of-the-moment opinions or talking a lot). In addition to being thoughtful, comments should be on point and relevant to the topic at hand. It's great if you take the lead during an exercise and/or agree to be the group spokesperson.

If you tend to be shy and don't verbally contribute as often to class discussion but are otherwise attentive and work productively in groups, you would probably fall in the low to mid B range. If you make a habit of being half asleep, or distracted, or fail to take class exercises seriously, then you would probably earn a C or less.

ATTENDANCE:

To participate, you have to be present, and class attendance at the university is expected.

But because life can be unpredictable, I'll allow up to **two (2) absences** without any negative impact to your grade. So save those days for any illnesses, doctor visits, out of town trips (including funerals or weddings), babysitter cancellations, flat tires, traffic back-ups, job interviews or career opportunities, alarm malfunctions, romantic hassles, etc. You don't need to tell me why you missed nor hand in doctor's notes. Use the two absences however you want. **For any days beyond these two that you miss, you will lose a percentage point off of your final class grade.** For example, a student who earned a 93 (A) in the class but missed four days total in the semester, for any reason, would lose two points and end up with a 91 (A-) in the class. Repeated tardiness will equate to an absence. Exceptions may be made for students whose absences are required to participate in university-sanctioned events. If you predict needing to miss many more than two classes for medical, personal, or professional reasons, you should consider taking the class in another semester.

On the upside, if you have *perfect* attendance all days we have class, you'll earn one extra percentage point added to your final overall course grade (which may bump you into another letter grade category). This means no absences for any reason – not even using the two “free” absences.

I will keep an attendance sheet at the front of the classroom, and it is your responsibility to **put your signature on the sheet at the beginning of each class period.** Sign in only for yourself, please.

FINAL PAPER (40%):

This final paper will reflect how well you have engaged the course objectives by applying what you've learned towards an ethical topic that most interests you. Choose an ethical topic/case study (problem) in your preferred field (public relations, journalism, advertising, entertainment media, or the media as a whole). You will introduce and describe the issue and its importance/relevance to media ethics and society, put it in socio-political and historical context, incorporate theoretical perspectives and research findings from experts in media and ethics, and analyze the specific case using a decision-making process, ending with your suggestion for the most ethical resolution.

To prepare, you should explore the issue by **reading academic/non-fiction sources** (books, documentaries, and academic journal articles) that critique the topic or critically analyze the issue. You should supplement this by researching a few **critical web sites** (like from non-profit groups listed on our external links section of ULearn, or others you find) and any related articles from **media trade/industry sources**. Then use the ethical decision-making skills you learned in this class to explain in detail how you **analyzed this issue as a case study** and came to some kind of ethically justifiable conclusion (considering all claimants' interests, weighing alternative solutions, and using ethical theories and professional ethical codes as a guide). Defend your solutions/conclusions and explain who needs to carry them out.

The paper will be 20-25 pages long, double-spaced (not including reference section and appendix) and will be due in Week 12 (early November). Prior to handing in the final draft, you will have received feedback from me multiple times in small chunks since you will hand in a literature review, an

ethical case analysis, and a rough draft first. So by the time your final draft is finished, the paper should be well-reviewed and edited. Therefore, this paper should not be a last-minute anxiety or burden, as we start working on it at the beginning of the semester so you are prepared by the time it is due (which is well before finals). All the written assignments you have due in this class (before the final exam) are helping you complete the final paper.

The preferred formatting/style for the paper and references is APA (American Psychological Association). You may want to consider investing in an APA style book as a reference, or check one out from the library reference desk for short-time use. Online, there are free tutorials and tip sheets accessible via the library's web page under Find Information / How do I cite a source and <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>

LITERATURE REVIEW (10%)

This is a section of your final paper. The literature review should provide an analysis of the body of knowledge relevant to your topic. It is where you explain what media experts/academics have to say regarding this issue and help situate your specific case within a larger ethical framework (of truth or justice/fairness). The end should narrow to introduce and detail the specific ethical dilemma/case you have chosen. No solutions or analysis needs to be included in this section. **It is a maximum of six pages (not including the reference page) and is due in Week 4.** This will end up being edited and possibly expanded to comprise the beginning of your final paper.

ETHICAL CASE ANALYSIS (10%)

This is a section of your final paper. In this section you apply the steps of the decision-making process to your case and come to a defensible conclusion about the most ethical resolution. It should refer back to sources in your literature review when those ideas and perspectives are helpful in supporting your argument. **It has an eight-page limit (not including the reference page) and is due in Week 7.** This will end up being edited and expanded to provide the bulk of your final paper.

ORAL PRESENTATION (10%)

In November, you will give a 10 minute presentation of your final paper in class so that everyone can learn from your case study analysis and discuss your ideas. The presentation should include some visual component and not just entail reading your paper.

FINAL EXAM (15%)

The take-home final exam will be based on your synthesis of the readings from the textbook, lectures and classroom discussions. The student will develop her/his own individual code of professional ethics. It is due the last week of class.

Grading Criteria:

Writing: A grading rubric will be used for all of the writing assignments in this course. The rubric considers writing competency (grammar and organization/flow), research and referencing competency (incorporates scholarly sources), critical-thinking and depth, logic/reasoning and argumentation, audience awareness (appropriate voice/style), and how well the content follows the assignment's criteria/requirements.

Academic Honesty and Good Practice: Don't plagiarize, people. This is an ETHICS class (it would be too ironic). If you do, I prophesize that your career will be an endless journey of unpaid internships at lame, cubicle-laden companies (and it could cause you to fail this course). Make sure that the work you turn in is your own or properly cited to avoid plagiarism (see GSU Academic Honesty Policy, Section 409). Here's how to avoid that (using APA style): If you are paraphrasing an idea you read about, cite the specific author and year of his/her publication in parenthesis at the end of the sentence...ex: (Garcia, 2008). You only need to use quotation marks if you copy something verbatim. For quoted material, add to the text citation the page number (for a book) or paragraph number (for web citation), so readers can easily verify the quotation. Have a reference section at the end of your paper with the full text/book citation. I prefer you use **APA style** unless you have a reason to use a different reference style (based on where you might send the paper for presentation or publication).

Course Schedule:

This is a tentative overview of the plan for the next eight weeks and does *not* include all readings and assignments. **In the future, please see ULearn's "schedule" folders for the most up-to-date and detailed daily assignment and reading list.**

WEEK 1: Aug. 18 & 20

Course syllabus review. Overview of ethics and its application to media

READING: Chapters 1 & 2 - ethics overview

ASSIGNMENT: PAPER TOPIC DUE WEEK #2

WEEK 2: Aug 25 & 27

TOPICS DUE TUESDAY

READING: Chapter 8 – economic pressures and social responsibility

Discussion of macro ethical issues in journalism

ASSIGNMENT: LITERATURE REVIEW DUE WEEK #4

WEEK 3: Sept 1 & 3

READING: Chapter 4 – truth, and Chapter 7- conflicts of interest

Discussion of macro ethical issues in public relations and advertising

WEEK 4: Sept. 8 & 10

LITERATURE REVIEW DUE THURSDAY

READING: Chapter 9 – media and anti-social behavior

Discussion of macro issues in entertainment and public media
ASSIGNMENT: ETHICAL CASE ANALYSIS DUE WEEK #7

WEEK 5: Sept. 15 & 17

READING: Chapter 3 – Ethical theory and moral reasoning
Discussion of ethical theories, values, and moral reasoning guidelines

WEEK 6: Sept. 22 & 24

READING: Professional codes of ethics
Application of ethical theory and codes to media decision-making

WEEK 7: Sept. 29 & Oct. 1

ETHICAL CASE ANALYSIS DUE TUESDAY

READING: Chapter 6 – Confidentiality

Discussion of micro issues in truth: confidentiality, withholding info, photo manipulation, and deception.

ASSIGNMENT: ROUGH DRAFT OF PAPER DUE WEEK #9

WEEK 8: Oct. 6 & 8

READING: Chapter 5 – privacy, and Chapter 10 – morally offensive content
Discussion of micro issues in avoiding harm: privacy and decency.

WEEK 9: Oct. 13 & 15

ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE TUESDAY

READING: Chapter 12 – social justice, and Chapter 13 – stereotyping

Discussion of micro issues in justice: for people, other animals, and nature

WEEK 10: Oct. 20 & 22

Group case studies – practice ethical decision-making and moral reasoning

WEEK 11: Oct. 27 & 29

Group case studies – practice ethical decision-making and moral reasoning

ASSIGNMENT: REVISE FINAL DRAFT

WEEK 12: Nov. 3 & 5

FINAL DRAFT DUE TUESDAY

WEEKS 12, 13 & 14: PRESENTATIONS OF PAPERS

WEEK 15: Nov. 24 & 26 Thanksgiving Holiday. No class. Work on take-home final exam.

WEEK 16: Dec. 1 & 3

READING: Bugeja book Chapter 10 (e-reserve) – Your ethical value system.

Course review and discuss our individual professional ethical guidelines

ASSIGNMENT: TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM DUE TUES. DEC. 1ST

Nothing due in finals week.

NOTE: Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University and for assessing my merit for tenure and promotion. So, upon completing the course, please take the time to fill out the online **course evaluation**. Thank you!

The End
... of this, and the beginning of all that....

*“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived,
but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” - Maya Angelou*

*“What lies behind us or before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE MAJOR:

Students upon graduating with a degree in Journalism should have the knowledge and competencies to successfully and ethically communicate in a diverse global and domestic society. This class aids in that effort. GSU journalism graduates should be aware of certain core values and be able to:

1. demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
2. demonstrate an understanding of the professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
3. think critically, creatively and independently;
4. conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
5. write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
6. critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.