LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES
IN COMMUNICATION

Course Description:

This course explores a number of legal and ethical issues in areas of importance to all of us, especially, to those of us who enter the professions in which communication plays the central role, such as journalism, advertising, public relations, and media production.

Learning Objectives:

Accordingly, the goals of the course include the following:

1) to understand legal principles and their application in key areas of communication law;

2) to understand key philosophical principles and their application to ethical issues in communication; and,

3) to employ principles of ethical decision-making in analyzing situations that raise ethical issues and in formulating principled resolutions to those issues.

By the conclusion of the course, you should have developed a more informed and systematic approach to dealing with issues of law and morality in communication as well as a greater sensitivity to the broad range of areas in which these issues may arise.

Student Learning Outcomes:

To help you achieve these goals, your specific objectives include the following:

1. Be able to identify and explain key legal concepts, the reasoning behind them, and their application in specific cases;
2. Be able to explain and apply the five philosophical foundations of ethical reasoning;
3. Be able to apply the Potter Box method of ethical analysis in specific cases; and
4. As a member of a small research team, to undertake independent research and analysis and to present your findings to the classes at the conclusion of the term.

Major Course Requirements and Expectations:

Your class performance and learning are assessed based on: Attendance/Participation, Exam I, Exam II, and Team Project Report.
Exam I is scheduled for September 27 during class time (bring bluebook).

Exam II is scheduled for November 1 during class time (bring bluebook).

Team Project Report (written and oral) will be scheduled during the last two weeks stretching into the final exams week. No final exam will be given.

The Term Project Report will be described in more detail, but generally, these are the expectations: You will work in research teams of 2 to 3 students to investigate an event or situation that raises ethical issues involving communication. Each team will select its own topic (subject to instructor’s approval and suggestions). Then, you will apply principles we study in this course to analyze those events. You will report your analysis and conclusions to the class in a 20-minute presentation. Each group will hand turn in a written paper, along with a bibliography of the sources cited.

Attendance/Participation: Because this course will rely a great deal on class discussion, your attendance and thoughtful participation is very important. You should come to class well-acquainted with the readings and be ready to discuss them. Three unexcused absences will lower your class grade by one letter grade.

Thus, your final grade will be determined on the following weightings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam I</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>90-100% = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam II</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>80-89% = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Project Report</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>70-79% = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>60-69% = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>59% - below = F</td>
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Required Textbooks and Readings:


Course Policies:

Attendance and Tardiness: Attendance is required—both physically and mentally. You are expected to take an active role in classroom discussions. Late arrivals, and chronic failure to engage in class discussion will all be reflected in your participation grade.

Late work and make-up exams

- If there should be a legitimate reason for you missing class (illness, family emergencies, certain University-sponsored extracurricular activities), please provide the instructor with the notification prior to the event or as soon as you are able—before the missed class period. If
appropriate, we can arrange alternate times for you to make up quizzes or exams, but it will be your responsibility to get any information from lecture from one of your classmates.

- Unexcused absences will be noted and reflected in your participation grade. Also, any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up.
- Late work for any reason considered unexcused will be panelized by at least one letter grade for each day it is late.

**Cell Phone/Electronic Device Usage:** While in class, please make sure your phone is off or on silent (and in your backpack or out of sight), so it’s not heard in class. Also, laptop use is not permitted.

- Please remember to check your email regularly for any course updates.
- If you would like to discuss any course readings, lectures, or assignments outside of class, you should feel free to contact me via email or by arranging to visit me during office hours or set up an appointment to see me at any other time.
- Please submit a hard copy of your Team papers, prior to the class period on the due date.
- All writing for this course must be composed using a standard, 12-point font size, and with the standard 1-inch margins.

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism:**

University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examination or examination materials, falsification, forgery complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work). In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in the course grade of F.

**Dropping the Course**

I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation will not automatically result in your being dropped from the class. Please check published dates for the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

**Preferred methods of scholarly citations**

For the purpose of citation, please follow The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition, humanities style (notes and bibliography). For guidance, see: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will result in the grade of F for the course.

**Classroom/professional behavior**

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.
Grade Appeals*

As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamu.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

Academic Advising: The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 361-825-3466.

Disabilities Accommodations*

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Driftwood 101.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Course Schedule and Assignments

(Please complete readings by the dates indicated. The schedule is subject to changes)

Aug. 25: Introduction: Ethical Foundations and perspectives

Aug. 30: Ethical reasoning and the Potter Box; Christians, pp. 1-27

Sept. 6: Ethics and Media Violence; Christians pp. 268 (music, TV), 272-277

Sept. 13: First Amendment: Siegal, pp. 1-5; Brandenburg case, pp. 7-9; Hess case in Siegal, pp. 9-11; First Amendment handout; Race and Reason case (handout), Christians, pp. 305-308 (“Stormfront”)

Sept. 20: Obscenity and pornography: Siegal: Miller v. California, pp. 236-239

Sept. 27: EXAM I (please bring bluebook to class); Broadcast regulation (Siegal: Red Lion v. FCC, pp. 262-269; FCC v. Pacifica, pp. 274-278

Oct. 4: Censorship and the Internet: Siegal, Reno v. ACLU, pp. 295-302; Christians, pp. 304-305

Oct. 18: Research team work day and discussion of team topics
Oct. 25: Social justice: World Cup soccer and sexism in reporting. Christians, pp. 96-100
Nov. 1: **Exam II (please bring bluebook to class)** Libel; Siegal, *NYT v. Sullivan*, pp. 64-69
Nov. 8: Copyright and Fair Use in Documentary Film (handout on Fair Use)
Nov. 15: Invasion of privacy; Siegal: Neff and Holman case, pp. 98-102; Christians, pp. 113-120. Blogs, news story/photo
Nov. 24: THANKSGIVING BREAK
Nov. 29: Ethics in public relations: VNR’s, conflicting loyalties, Pepsi. Christians, pp. 229-232; 235-239; 251-253; Reality TV, media scope and depth. Christians pp. 295-296
Dec. 6: **Team Project presentations; Written Project Due**