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 performance in class and learning are assessed based on: 1) Attendance/Participation, 2) Weekly Analytical Essays, and 3) Term Paper and Presentation.

Weekly 2 to 3-Page Analytical Short Essays (4 total): will be based on lecture and discussion topics from class. Students will select a reading from popular press or scholarly
journal based on the topics of the previous class and apply critical thought and conclusions. Essays need to be typed double-spaced, standard font in a 12 pt. size with appropriate reference to the timely subject matter at hand. Only hard copies will be accepted.

**Final Paper** will be due the final day of class. Students will investigate an event or situation that raises ethical issues involving communication then write a comprehensive research paper applying critical thought and topics from class lectures and discussions. The paper is expected to be professionally written [12 pt. standard font], at least 10 pages [including bibliography] and to have a minimum of 8 sources. Only hard copies will be accepted.

**Presentation:** Students will report their Final Paper analysis and conclusions to the class in a 10-minute presentation. Each student will hand turn in a written outline of the main points in your report along with a bibliography of the sources cited.

The Final Paper and Presentation will be described in more detail in a separate handout, but generally, these are the expectations.

**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. Perfect attendance is expected. Three unexcused absences will lower your grade by one letter grade.

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

- 4 Weekly 2 to 3-Page Analytical Short Essays: 10% each for 40%
- 1 Term Project Report: 40%
- Attendance/Participation: 20%  Total possible grade: 100%

**Grading Scale:** 90-100%=A; 80-89%=B; 70-79%=C; 60-69%=D; 59%-below=F

**Required Readings:**

Copies of required readings will be distributed in class with the expectation that you will complete the assigned readings prior to each class in which the material is discussed and debated.

**Course Policies:**

- **Attendance and Tardiness:** Attendance is required—both physically and mentally. You are expected to take an active role in classroom discussions. Absences, 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 penalized by at least one letter grade for each day it is late, as noted earlier.

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.

- No multitasking during class time [no laptops, texting or private conversations]
- 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 hard copies of your papers, prior to the class period on the due date. Marked copies will be returned to you.
- 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.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.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.

COMM 4395: Course Schedule and Assignments

(Textbook and additional readings will be assigned in class each week. The schedule is subject to change)

June 2, 3: Introduction: Ethical Foundations, reasoning and perspectives; the Potter Box
June 4, 5: Law/Ethics and Media Violence
June 9, 10: First Amendment; Institutional Pressures on Media (short essay # 1 due)
June 11, 12: Broadcast regulation; Obscenity and pornography (short essay # 2 due)
June 16, 17: Social Justice; Libel (short essay # 3 due)
June 18, 19: Copyright and Fair Use in Documentary Film (short essay # 4 due)
June 23, 24: Invasion of Privacy; Censorship and the Internet (draft term paper)
June 25, 26: Ethics in Advertising (draft term paper); oral presentations
June 30, July 1: Ethics in Public Relations and Persuasion (draft term paper); oral presentations
July 2: Ethics in Entertainment: Oral presentations & **WRITTEN TERM PAPERS DUE**