FIRST AMENDMENT AND ETHICAL ISSUES
IN MEDIA & 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.

Textbook and Readings:

**Major Course Requirements and Expectations:**

Your performance in class and learning are assessed based on: 1) *Attendance/Participation*, 2) *Three Analytical Short Essays*; and 3) *Oral and Written Presentation of Term Paper*

**Three analytical 4-page 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 classes 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.

**Term 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 10-12 pages [including bibliography in APA Style] and to have a minimum of 8 sources. Only hard copies will be accepted.

**Oral Presentation:** Students will report their Term Paper analysis and conclusions to the class in a 10-minute presentation. Each student will hand turn in a 1-page written outline of the main points in your paper for distribution in class.

If needed, the Term Paper and Presentation will be described in more detail in class, 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:

- 3 Analytical 2-Page Short Essays: 15% each for 45%
- 1 Term Paper written and oral: 35%
- Attendance/Participation: 20%  Total possible grade: 100%

**Grading Scale:** 90-100%=A (Excellent); 80-89%=B (Very Good); 70-79%=C (Average); 60-69%=D (Below Average); 59% below= F (Failure)

**Required Readings:**

Weekly assigned readings from the required textbook --and related material 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.
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 Corpus Christi Hall 116. 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.

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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Dropping a Class

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 your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course. 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. June 21 is the last date to drop with an automatic “W”.

Grade Appeals

As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, 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 Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals. These documents are accessible online at: http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office in the college in which the course is taught. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal in CLA, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html.

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.

Statement of Civility

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has a diverse student population that represents the population of the state. Our goal is to provide you with a high quality educational experience that is free from repression. You are responsible for following the rules of the University, city, state and federal government. We expect that you will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on
the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

**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 examinations 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 grade of F.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism**

**Definition:** In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source. Plagiarism is a violation academic expectations, but it is sometimes difficult to understand what plagiarism actually is. Often, students commit unintentional plagiarism (not citing sources properly, for example), because they are unaware of the standards that apply. Plagiarism includes:

- Using the work of another as your own,
- Downloading or purchasing ready-made essays off the web and using them as your own,
- Using resource materials without correct documentation,
- Using the organization or language of a source without using quote marks and proper citation.
- Turning in a researched project without citing sources in an appropriate documentation style.

When you are confused about citation of quotes or ideas, please visit the Writing Center or me to get help. Information on MLA documentation rules and APA documentation rules is available at Purdue University’s OWL: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/, and from our local Writing Center at CASA.

**Statement of Academic Continuity**

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

**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.
MEDA 4341: Course Schedule and Assignments

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

June 3-6: Introduction to the Course
First Amendment & Ethical Foundations
Legal Reasoning and Perspectives
Potter Box of Reasoning

June 10-13: Law and intersection of Ethics
Violence and Sexual Content in the Media *(Short essay # 1 due)*
Institutional Pressures on Media
Broadcast regulation
Obscenity and pornography

June 17-20: Social Justice
Libel and Slander
Copyright and Fair Use in Documentary Film *(Short essay # 2 due)*
Invasion of Privacy
Censorship and the Internet
Ethics in Advertising
Ethics in Public Relations

June 24-27: Advertising and Persuasion (Guest speaker TBA)
Advertising and Persuasion *(Short essay # 3 due)*
Ethics in Entertainment (Guest speaker TBA)
Topics and Oral presentations of Term Paper begin

July 1-3: Oral presentations

WRITTEN TERM PAPER DUE IN LAST CLASS PERIOD
ABOUT THE PROFESSOR

Anantha S. Babbili (Ph.D., The University of Iowa) is Professor of Communication & Media Studies at Texas A&M - Corpus Christi. He was Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs of the university from 2007 to 2010. He is former Dean of the College of Mass Communication (2002-2007) at Middle Tennessee State University. Babbili taught and directed the Journalism and Media Studies department at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, for more than two decades. He was the visiting Rogers Chair in Journalism and New Information Technologies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada and lectured in Mexico, India, Slovakia, UK and Asia. Babbili is the co-author of the book, An Ethics Trajectory, published by the University of Illinois Press and has published his research in several books including Communication Ethics and University Values, Critical Issues in Media, Bosnia by Television (British Film Institute), Mass Media in the Middle East, and The Press and the State.

A former journalist, Babbili has published scholarly articles that have appeared in journals such as Media, Culture and Society, Journal of Communication Inquiry, Newspaper Research Journal and the International Third World Studies Journal. Babbili was the Editor (2000-2008) of the national Journalism & Communication Monographs and served on the editorial boards of the Journal of Mass Media Ethics and Journalism Studies. He is on the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences advisory board at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He received the Barry Bingham Award from the National Conference of Editorial Writers and was the consultant to the United Nations and the UNESCO on human rights and communication. The Carnegie Foundation and the Council on the Advancement and Support of Teaching named Babbili the Texas Professor of the Year. He is the recipient of the National Teaching Award from the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, St. Petersburg, Florida. His columns and opinions as a news source on breaking events and U.S. foreign policy appeared on CNN, ABC News, CBS, and NBC and in Chicago Tribune, New York Times, Fort Worth Star-Telegram and other media outlets. Before earning his doctorate, Babbili earned two undergraduate degrees in biological sciences and journalism from his native India and M.A. in journalism from the University of Oklahoma.

Since 2006, Babbili has been a member of the governing board of a communication institute operated by a reputed media-related reputed foundation in India. As the Provost of Texas A&M Corpus Christi, Babbili served as the chief institutional liaison to the successful SACS accreditation Process and was responsible for overall quality of academic affairs of the University. He is the graduate of the Management and Leadership program of Harvard University.

What do we do in the Department of Communication & Media? Here’s our mission:

Develop students who are effective and ethical communicators with the creative, critical, and collaborative skills necessary to succeed in a diverse global environment.

What are the Department’s Objectives? After graduation, our graduates are able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively;
- Practice the ability to work with others to create a product; and
- Recognize ethical issues in communication