

# COM 415 MEDIA ETHICS

Department of Communication  
Fall 2002 MW 11:15-12:30 (1:10) AC 106

Instructor: Dr. Elizabeth Hansen

Alumni Coliseum 113, telephone 622-1488 (office), 622-1871 (leave message)  
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Office hours: MW 1-3:30 and by appointment.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Prerequisite: COM 200 or instructor approval. Examination of ethical standards and practices of the mass media. Includes development of ethical decision-making skills.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to help you (1) develop analytical skills by introducing you to the intellectual steps involved in moral reasoning and giving you practice in using them; (2) to improve awareness of moral and ethical issues related to mass media through examination of actual and hypothetical cases; (3) to encourage you to think about the impact of what you do as a media professional as it relates to you, your peers, your employer and the public.

## TEXTS

1. Christians, Clifford G., Mark Fackler, Kim B. Rotzoll and Kathy Brittain McKee. *Media Ethics: Cases & Moral Reasoning* (6th edition). New York: Longman, 2001.
2. Additional readings and cases distributed in class or posted online on the course site on Blackboard at <http://learn.eku.edu>.

## CLASS REQUIREMENTS

**1. Participation.** This class is designed as a senior level seminar. It is not a lecture class. You are expected to attend class regularly, to come to each class prepared, and actively to participate in class discussion--both as a speaker and as a listener. The quality of the class depends on the effort of each person. Sometimes case presentations will be assigned in advance. At other times, one or more students may be selected at random at the beginning of class and those persons will be responsible for leading discussion of material assigned for that class session. Some days every class member may be asked to contribute to the discussion or participate in a role-playing exercise. Participation points will be awarded at most class meetings. Assignment of points will be based on the quality of your contribution, not quantity alone.

**2. Journal/Writing Assignments.** You will keep an ethics "journal" in which you react to/comment on the subject matter of the course. In effect, you will be extending our class discussions in journal form. Sometimes, I will assign you to write a journal entry on a particular topic or ask you to analyze a video we watch. Topics for other entries will be your choice. For example, you might write about a current issue in your field, a tough ethical decision you've had to make, your own ethical growth and development or your

values. Journal entries should be typed, double-spaced, and kept together in a notebook or folder. Journal entries will be collected periodically during the semester and graded.

**3. Semester project.** You will have three options for your semester project:

A. You may write a formal research paper on an ethical issue of interest to you.

B. You may write a factual case analysis of an ethical situation of interest to you.

C. You may conduct an ethics study of a newspaper, radio or television station, cable operation, public relations firm, advertising agency or other media organization of your choice. In addition to the literature, your study should draw on interviews and examination of codes of ethics and ethical standards for the organization (written and unwritten), etc.

Maximum length: 15 pages typewritten (excluding bibliography, appendices). Topics must be selected (after a conference with me) and submitted in writing no later than **Monday, Oct. 7, 2002 (20 points)**. By **Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2002**, you will turn in a typed, detailed one-page plan for your project and a proposed bibliography containing at least 10 sources (including books, journal articles, interviews, letters, clippings of news articles, etc.) **(30 points)**. A rough draft of your project is due no later than **Monday, Nov. 4, 2002. (50 points)**. Final papers/projects **(100 points)** are due **Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2002**, and will be presented orally in class **(50 points)**. More details later.

**4. Midterm exam.** This will be an in-class essay exam.

**5. Final exam.** Your final will be a take-home exam.

## **EVALUATION**

Your grade will be figured in the following way:

Participation 25 percent

Journal/Writing Assignments 25 percent

Semester project/presentation 25 percent

Midterm exam 10 percent

Final exam 15 percent

Letter grades for the course will be assigned in the following way:

A 94-100

A- 90-93.9

B+ 87-89.9

B 83-86.9

B- 80-82.9

C+ 77-79.9

C 73-76.9

C- 70-72.9

D+ 67-69.9

D 63-66.9

D- 60-62.9

F 59.9 and below

Mid-term evaluation: You will receive a mid-term grade. It will be assigned no later than Oct. 4, 2002.

**GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY, SPELLING:** On all written work, both what you write about and how you write are important. Your writing must be well organized, clear, concise and accurate, and you are expected to use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. Misspelled words and factual, grammatical, punctuation and typographical errors will lower your grade.

**PLAGIARISM AND HONESTY:** You are expected to do your own work. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any student who cheats or plagiarizes will receive an automatic "F" for the course and appropriate university officials will be notified. Additional sanctions are also possible. (See the *University Handbook for Students* for definitions of cheating and plagiarism).

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Truth and honesty are highly valued in mass communications and, therefore, highly valued in this class. For that reason, honesty plays a key role in the attendance policy for this class. Attendance is your responsibility. Any absence will be considered an excused absence if the following conditions are met:

--If you miss a class, you must write a letter to me explaining why you were absent. No telephone calls, recorded messages or in-person explanations will be accepted.

--You must tell the truth in your letter.

--You must submit the letter to me the first class meeting after the absence.

--If you miss a class and lie about the reason, you will fail the class.

## **IMPORTANT:**

**Excessive absences--excused or unexcused--will negatively affect your participation grade for the class.** There is no way to "make up" participation points. You must be in class in order to earn the points. In-class quizzes and exercises cannot be made up. Written work and exams missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up. If you must miss the midterm exam or the final exam period because you are ill or have another legitimate reason for missing it, you must notify me **BEFORE** the exam in order to make it up. You must also follow the procedures outlined above in order for the absence to be excused.

You are expected to arrive for class on time. If you are tardy, you may miss important announcements, disrupt class discussion, and/or find yourself struggling to "catch up" with the conversation. If you are late, it is your responsibility to see that I have marked you present for the day. Excessive tardiness will affect your daily participation grade. I may invite guest speakers to the class during the semester. Because this is a small class, your attendance will be particularly appreciated on days we have guests.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** If you are registered with the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities, please make an appointment with the course instructor to discuss any academic accommodations you need. If you need academic accommodations

and are not registered with the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities, please contact the office on the third floor of the Student Services Building, by email at disabilities@eku.edu or by telephone at 859-622-2933 V/TDD. Upon individual request, this syllabus can be made available in alternative forms.

INCLEMENT WEATHER PLAN: If the university is using the 2-hour delay inclement weather plan, the class will start at 12:30 p.m. and end at 1:30 p.m. Tune to your local radio or TV station for the announcement, check the ECU home page or call 622-2239.

PORTFOLIO: You are encouraged to save your best work from the class for possible inclusion in your portfolio.

### **CLASS SCHEDULE**

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change. Readings should be completed by the date for which they are listed. Additional readings may be added as needed or as issues arise during the semester.

### **DATE TOPIC READING**

8/19 Introduction to course

8/21 *Absence of Malice* (class meets until 1:10 p.m.)

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8/26 *Absence of Malice* journal entry due

Case analysis due

8/27 **LAST DATE TO DROP WITHOUT A "W"; LAST DAY TO ADD A COURSE.**

8/28 *Ethical Foundations/Perspectives Media Ethics* pp. 1-30

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9/2 Holiday--no class

9/4 Ethical Foundations, con't

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9/9 Ethical Foundations, con't

9/11 **News Media Ethics** pp. 31-33

Business pressures *Media Ethics* ch. 1

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9/16 Business pressures, con't

9/18 Business pressures, con't

9/20 *High School Journalism Workshop* Perkins Building, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.)

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9/23 Truth-telling *Media Ethics* ch. 2

9/25 Truth-telling, con't

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9/30 Reporters and Sources *Media Ethics* ch. 3

10/2 Reporters and Sources, con't

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10/7 Reporters and Sources, con't

**SEMESTER PROJECT TOPIC DUE**

10/9 Social Justice *Media Ethics* ch. 4

*10/11 MIDTERM--LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM A CLASS*

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10/14 Holiday-no class

10/16 Social Justice, con't

Catch-up/Review

**SEMESTER PROJECT PLAN, BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

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10/21 **MIDTERM EXAM**

10/23 Invasion of Privacy *Media Ethics* ch. 5

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10/28 Invasion of Privacy, con't

10/30 Department of Communication Advising Day -- class does not meet

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*11/4-11/8 EKU Business Ethics Awareness Week*

11/4 **Persuasion in Advertising** *Media Ethics* pp. 127-133

Special Audiences, What to Advertise *Media Ethics* chs. 6, 7

**DRAFT OF SEMESTER PROJECT DUE**

***11/5 Ethics Debate, Clark Auditorium, Wallace Building, 6-7 p.m.-- ATTENDANCE REQUIRED***

11/6 How to Say It, Media Considerations *Media Ethics* chs. 8, 9

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11/11 **Persuasion and Public Relations** *Media Ethics* pp. 197-198

Public Communication, Telling the Truth *Media Ethics* chs. 10, 11  
in Organizational Settings

11/13 Conflicting Loyalties, The Demands *Media Ethics* chs. 12, 13  
of Social Responsibility

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11/18 Moral development theory

11/20 **SEMESTER PROJECT DUE**

**Project presentations**

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11/25 **Project presentations**

11/27 Holiday-no class

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12/2 **Project presentations**

12/4 **Project presentations**

Last day of class

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**FINAL EXAM PERIOD: Monday, Dec. 9, 2002, 10:30-12:30**

**Take-home final due at beginning of final exam period.**