2014

477-01 Strategic Communication Ethics

Gwyneth Mellinger

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COMM 477: Strategic Communication Ethics
COMM 334: Issues in Advertising
Spring 2014
2:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. Tues/Thurs

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Office: 303 Schott
Phone: 513-745-2956 (office); 785-760-3772 (cell)
Office hours: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. TTh and by appointment

REQUIRED TEXT:


OTHER READING/VIEWING: Additional reading and videos will be assigned in class and linked on Canvas.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: This course in communication and media ethics is tailored to upperclassmen and exceptional underclassmen who have a basic knowledge of communication principles and the workings of the mass media. Readings, discussions, and research are intended to provoke thoughtful examination of:

• the operation of moral agency and social responsibility in news organizations and in advertising and public relations occupations.
• the ethical basis of decision-making by journalists and advertising and public relations practitioners.
• ethical dilemmas in the mass media, both contemporary and historical.
• the impact of mass communication and the media on public and private life in the United States.

Students who successfully complete this course will have a context in which to make ethical decisions in any communication-related or mass media occupation and an understanding of the impact of the media’s ethical decisions upon society. Students will gain the ability to judge the ethical performance of the media and will become more astute consumers of the media. In addition, students will have substantial practice writing critical analyses of ethical issues in the media.

CANVAS & COMMUNICATION: This course will use Canvas for the grade book, announcements, and the submission of certain assignments. In addition, links to and pdfs of readings and videos will be found there. Class cancellation notices and information about assignments will be communicated through the site.

Therefore, please set your notification preferences in Canvas. If I need to communicate with you, I will do so through the site. Each student is responsible for any content on the site.

CLASS FORMAT & ATTENDANCE: During most class meetings we will engage in a discussion in which you will make informed contributions based on that day’s reading assignment, as well as other information you gather as you critique media content and monitor media criticism.
Because participation and discussion are necessary for learning to take place in a course of this type, attendance is expected. Students will receive 5 points for attending each class meeting until final presentations begin. Roll will be taken at the beginning of the class period and points will be awarded to those who are present at the time attendance is recorded.

Attendance points may not be made up or excused. This will not unduly penalize students who routinely come to class but get the flu or must miss a class here and there to participate in athletic competition or a university-sponsored event. This policy is designed to reward conscientious students who routinely attend class.

PROFESSIONALISM: In many cases, discussions of ethics find multiple plausible answers and not very many clearly right and wrong ones. Some of us may come to this class with strongly held opinions on some of the touchier issues we will discuss — such as race, violence, and sexual content. While I look forward to and encourage vigorous and free-ranging discussion, I ask that we all check our assumptions at the door and that our class meetings be governed by the thoughtful, respectful, and civil exchange of ideas.

A further note on professionalism: You are encouraged to use your smart phone, tablet, or laptop to look up information relevant to class discussions; however, please be aware that professionalism means knowing and respecting boundaries. Let’s avoid using electronic devices for social communication or Internet activity unrelated to the course.

An illustration will clarify this distinction: “With freedom comes responsibility.” Had you heard those words during a class discussion and wondered about their origin, you might have performed an Internet search and learned that this quotation is attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt. That would be an appropriate in-class use of a smart phone; texting a friend during class to share this bit of wisdom would not.

DEADLINES: Late work will not be accepted. Please budget your time to allow you to meet all assignment deadlines. Assume that computers are out to get you and take all necessary steps to ensure that technological complications will not foil your efforts. Please do not ask for deadline extensions on written work; none will be given. Assignments that must be turned in on paper will be collected at the beginning of class. Those that may be uploaded to Canvas must be posted to the site by the start of class on the day they are due.

Students also must be prepared to make presentations when assigned. Presentations may not be made up at a later date. If you know in advance that you will not be able to give your presentation on the assigned date, you will need to find a classmate willing to switch with you. Please notify the instructor of the switch at least a week in advance.

This policy is designed to create a level playing field for all students in the course. A commitment to fairness and equity is the motivation for the enforcement of deadlines.

WRITTEN WORK: All written work submitted in this course must be typed (12-point Times or Times New Roman) and double-spaced, with standard margins. Work that does not meet these minimal specifications will not be graded. I will distribute additional format guidelines for the critical essays and the research essay.

Assignments that are submitted through the Canvas site, including the response paragraphs and mini-presentation summaries, MUST be Word documents. Other written assignments, such as the critical essays and components of the research project, should be printed out and submitted in class. Do not e-mail assignments to the instructor unless you have made prior arrangements to do so. Printer problems are not a reason to e-mail an assignment.

The quality of writing, including structure and mechanics, will be a factor in the grade for each assignment. If you are not already aware of this fact, please note that the word “media” is the plural form of “medium” and takes the plural verb and pronoun forms. Example: The media are a powerful force in society, and they are pervasive (NOT media is and it is).
EXAMS: There will be no exams in this course, meaning there will be no final, meaning that you need not present yourself during the final exam period.

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE: If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodations, you must register with Disability Services in the Learning Assistance Center before accommodations can be implemented. The first step to coordinate reasonable accommodations is to contact the Learning Assistance Center (745-3280) in the Conaton Learning Commons, Suite 514, to schedule an appointment. Then, you will need to meet with me to discuss your accommodations for this course. (This statement was prepared by the LAC staff.)

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT: We have no tolerance for it in this course. Plagiarism and fabrication have no place in the communication and media professions. While the theft of others’ words and ideas and the fabrication of information are serious matters in any area of academia, such conduct would be particularly pernicious in a course such as this one, which is devoted to the contemplation of ethical standards. Plagiarism and fabrication have been the sources of several prominent media scandals in recent years, some of which we will discuss this semester. In most circumstances, such conduct will get you fired from a job in a news organization or other professional environment. In this course, it may result in an automatic F in this class.

In addition to professional considerations, honesty is a foundational requirement in a community of scholars committed to learning and discovery. The university’s policy in this area, which is found in the online University Catalog, will guide us:

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.

All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.

Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an “F” in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course. If disputes of interpretation arise, the student, faculty member, and chair should attempt to resolve the difficulty. If this is unsatisfactory, the dean will rule in the matter. As a final appeal, the academic vice president will call a committee of tenured faculty for the purpose of making a final determination.

Please be advised that in the academic environment, the failure to cite and document correctly is often regarded as plagiarism. For example, a complete bibliography/works-cited page will not prevent a charge of plagiarism if the use of the sources is not documented with internal citations. If you have questions about how to cite correctly, ask.
GRADING: All work will be evaluated on a point system:

Class participation (5 points per class meeting through Week 13)
Response paragraphs (15 points each)
Critical analysis essays (100 points each)
Case-Study Presentation (50 points)
Research proposal (50 points)
Research project (250 points)
Research presentation (50 points)
Evaluations of classmates’ presentations (5 points each)

At semester’s end, letter grades will be assigned as based on the percentage of points accumulated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94% and higher</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>76-74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>73-70%</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>69-67%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>66-64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>63-60%</td>
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</table>

SOME DEFINITIONS: Following are the types of assignments on which your grade will be based. Scores on written work will be assigned based on the depth and originality of your thinking, the quality of the writing, and your ability to integrate your arguments and/or observations with the overall objectives of the course.

- **Response paragraph**: The expectation is for a well-developed, multi-sentence paragraph offering an insightful and comprehensive response to assigned reading or videos. This paragraph will provide a clear and detailed statement of the themes or the general hypotheses of the materials and will contain specific references to the text being considered. In the process, the response should disclose something you did not know before the reading/viewing, something with which you strongly agree or disagree, a question that the author left unanswered — that sort of thing. I’m looking for substantive responses that demonstrate meaningful engagement with the assignment, not a summary of what you have read or seen. A rubric is provided.

- **Case-Study Presentation**: Each student will be randomly assigned to present a case study or other information related to the topics covered during the week in which the presentation is scheduled. The topic will be selected by the student but must be approved by the instructor; therefore, it is to the student’s benefit to consult with the instructor at least a week before the date scheduled for the presentation. The entire presentation will take 10 minutes and will be followed by a Q&A. A rubric is provided.

- **Critical analysis paper**: A two- to three-page essay in response to an ethical dilemma faced by the media or communication professionals. The topic will be assigned by the instructor at least 10 days before the essay is due. A rubric is provided.

- **Research project**: A well-researched, well-written, and properly sourced inquiry into an ethical issue related to media, public relations, advertising, or communication. The proposal, which is worth 50 points, should describe your paper and its thesis in detail and must include an annotated bibliography of at least eight specific sources
you know are available. You must receive approval of the research proposal before you commence work on the actual project. The paper must be at least eight pages in length and include a minimum of twelve sources, not counting the textbook, codes of ethics, and dictionaries/encyclopedias. Each student also will make a 10-minute presentation on the research project. Rubrics will be used to evaluate the paper and presentation. Students in the audience will provide anonymous evaluations of the presentations using a rubric.

**TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR:** This schedule is subject to change, so listen in class and monitor the Canvas site for any amendments to due dates, etc. The instructor will provide links or pdf’s for out-of-class videos and readings outside the Christians text.

**Week 1:** Jan. 14 & 16: Overview to Ethics in Media & Strategic Communication


- **Th:** Read Christians, Introduction (“Ethical Foundations and Perspectives”), pp. 1-27; **response paragraph due.**

**Week 2:** Jan. 21 & 23: Ethics, cont.

- **T:** Read “Ethics” by Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley; **response paragraph due.** “Tipsy Mayor” hypothetical.

- **Th:** Read Christians, Chapter 1 (“Institutional Pressures”), pp. 31-46; **response paragraph due.** “Dollars & Cents” hypothetical. **SP: Stauder**

**Week 3:** Jan. 28 & 30: News

- **T:** Read Christians, Chapter 2 (“Truthtelling”), pp. 47-59; **response paragraph due.** **SP: Popalisky**

- **Th:** Read Carl Bernstein’s “Best Obtainable Version of the Truth”; **response paragraph due.** **SP: Paschen**

**Week 4:** Feb. 4 & 6: News, cont.

- **T:** Read Christians, Chapters 3 (“Reporters and Sources”), pp. 60-77; **response paragraph due.** “Unsolicited Leak” hypothetical. **SP: O’Brien**

- **Th:** Read Kovich & Rosenstiel’s “The Journalism of Verification”; **response paragraph due.** **First critical analysis essay due in class.** “Confidential Source” hypothetical.

**Week 5:** Feb. 11 & 13: The Media and Difference

- **T:** Read and listen to “How ‘The Hidden Brain’ Does the Thinking for Us” and read Christians, Chapter 4 (“Social Justice”), 89-107; **single response paragraph due on both.** **SP: Mock**
Th: Class will not meet. View Ethnic Notions on your own using the link found on the Canvas site.


T: **Response paragraph due** on Ethnic Notions. “Heritage Picnic” hypothetical. **SP: McMahon**

Th: Read excerpt from How Race Is Lived in America; **response paragraph due.** “Sports Mascot” hypothetical. **SP: Mackey**

Week 7: Feb. 25 & 27: Research overview

T: **Research proposals due.** Discussion of research process and documentation.

Th: Research proposals returned. Discussion of research process. Discussion of paper format.

Week 8: March 4 & 6: Spring Break

No classes.

Week 9: March 11 & 13: Privacy and Sensitivity

T: **Second media analysis essay due.** Read Christians, Chapter 5 (“Invasion of Privacy”), pp. 95-113; **response paragraph due.** **SP: Kohls.** Case studies on media coverage of the homeless and mentally ill.

Th:. Read “The Falling Man”; **response paragraph due.** “Drunken Professor” hypothetical. **SP: Knight**

Week 10: March 18 & 20: Public Relations and Persuasion

T: Read Christians, Chapter 10 (“Public Communication”), pp. 201-12; and public relations code of ethics at www.prsa.org; **response paragraph due on both.** **SP: Jones**

Th: Read Christians, Chapter 11 (“Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings”), pp. 213-25; **response paragraph due.** “Bogus Professor” hypothetical. **SP: Jelaji**

Week 11: March 25 & 27: Public Relations and Persuasion

T: Read Christians, Chapter 12 (“Conflicting Loyalties”), pp. 226-38; **response paragraph due.** “Freebies” hypothetical. **SP: Jacob**

Th: Read Christians, Chapter 13 (“The Demands of Social Responsibility”), pp. 239-46; **response paragraph due.** “Toxic Spill” hypothetical. **SP: Guere**

Week 12: April 1 & 3: Persuasion in Advertising

T: Read Christians, Chapter 6 (“The Commercialization of Everyday Life”), pp. 120-37, and American Advertising Federation Ethics and Principles; **single response paragraph due on both.** **SP: Chambers**
Th: Read Christians, Chapter 7 (“Advertising in an Image-Based Culture”), pp. 138-54; **response paragraph due.** Watch *Killing Us Softly IV*.

**Week 13: April 8 & 10: Persuasion in Advertising**


Th: View *Tough Guise* video in class. **Third media analysis essay due.**

**Week 14: April 15 & 17: Persuasion in Advertising**

T: **Response paragraph due** on *Tough Guise*. Read Christians, Chapter 9 (“Advertising’s Professional Culture”), pp. 177-97; **response paragraph due. SP: Bediako**

Th: No class. Easter break.

**Week 15: April 22 & 24: Research presentations**

T: Bediako, Bunch, Chambers, Guere, Jacob, Jelaji

Th: Jones, Knight, Kohls, Mackey, McMahon

**Week 16: April 29 & May 1: Grand finale**

T: Mock, O’Brian, Paschen, Popalisky, Stauder

Th: Wrap-up. Research papers returned.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Does the response contain a clear and detailed statement of the</td>
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<td>themes or general hypotheses of the assigned reading or video?</td>
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<td>2. Does the response contain specific references to the content?</td>
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<td>3. Is it clear that the student engaged the assignment in a</td>
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<td>meaningful way?</td>
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<td>4. Does the response demonstrate original thinking or analysis of the</td>
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<td>subject matter?</td>
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<td>5. Is the response well-written?</td>
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Total points: ______ of 15
### Critical Analysis Essay Rubric

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Section</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Clear thesis &amp; introduction</td>
<td>______ of 10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Organization &amp; unity</td>
<td>______ of 10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Quality of arguments/Ethical reasoning</td>
<td>______ of 50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. Quality of writing</td>
<td>______ of 25 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>V. Definitive conclusion</td>
<td>______ of 5 points</td>
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</tbody>
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**Other comments:** ______ of 100 points
COMM 334/477
Presentation

Name: ______________________
Date: _______________________
Topic: ______________________

Are the topic and the issue related to media ethics clearly stated near the beginning of the presentation? 1 2 3 4 5

Is the presentation coherent and well-organized? Does the presentation reach a tidy conclusion? 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presenter provide adequate background for the audience to understand the issue in question? 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presentation contain examples or illustrations of the issue? 1 2 3 4 5

Is the presentation adequately researched? (at least three sources) 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presenter properly acknowledge the sources, orally and in writing? 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presenter identify and explain values and loyalties? 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presenter identify and explain the relevance of at least two ethical principles? 1 2 3 4 5

Does the presenter offer at least two discussion questions at the conclusion of the presentation? Does the presenter interact with audience members during the Q&A period? 1 2 3 4 5

Are slides visually engaging and free of mechanical errors? (Presenter must provide instructor with full-page printout of slides.) 1 2 3 4 5

Score: ____________ of 50

Time : ____________________
(Target is 9:30 to 10:30 minutes, not including the Q&A.)

Comments: