

# MCOM 3120

## ETHICS & RESPONSIBILITY IN MASS COMMUNICATIONS

### CLASS TIME & LOCATION

(Winter 2004)  
Mondays and  
Wednesdays  
11 a.m. to  
12:50 p.m.  
MCOM 121

### INSTRUCTOR

Laura A. Ruel  
MCOM 107  
(303) 871-3984  
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### OFFICE HOURS

Mondays and  
Wednesdays  
1 to 2 p.m.  
(and by  
appointment)

### TEACHING ASSISTANT

Kristi Phillips  
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### REQUIRED PURCHASE



Ethics in Media  
Communications:  
Cases and  
Controversies  
by Louis A. Day

### PDF OF SYLLABUS

With active links to  
all online readings:  
<http://du.edu/~lrue>

### ▶ COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In the fast-paced world of mass communications, the practice of ethics can sometimes appear to be an afterthought. Some journalists and communicators get so good at uncovering stories and meeting deadlines that they often don't consider the ethical impact and repercussions of their work.

But that is only *some* communicators.

The truly excellent communicators – whether journalists, film makers, PR practitioners or advertisers – have a solid understanding of media ethics and responsibility. This observation doesn't mean they spend hours during their work days debating lofty theoretical concepts, but it does mean that sometime during their careers they took the time to analyze, solidify and understand their personal definitions of responsible, ethical communication. As ethical challenges arise, they draw on these values and momentarily step back from the daily grind and make confident, well-informed decisions.

My main objective, therefore, it to get you started on the road to becoming an excellent communicator by helping you develop *your* core knowledge about ethical and responsible communication.

### ▶ IMPORTANT POLICIES

Simply put, attendance is required, participation is expected and deadlines are absolute. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the specified due dates. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

### ▶ GRADING CRITERIA

Your grade for this course will be based on the following components. (Each component is explained in greater detail on Page 2 of this syllabus.)

- Written analyses of ethical challenges: 400 total points
- Journal: 300 total points
- Group presentation: 100 total points
- Class attendance, participation and online discussions: 100 total points
- Quizzes (may be unannounced): 100 total points

**TOTAL: 1000 points**

*Extra credit assignments may be offered at the discretion of the instructor.*

### ▶ GRADE SCALE

A .....	915-1000 pts.	B- .....	795-814 pts.	D+ .....	675-694 pts.
A- .....	895-914 pts.	C+ .....	775-794 pts.	D .....	615-674 pts.
B+ .....	875-894 pts.	C .....	715-774 pts.	D- .....	595-614 pts.
B .....	815-874 pts.	C- .....	695-714 pts.	F .....	594 & below

▶ **WRITTEN ANALYSES OF ETHICAL CHALLENGES**

(100 points each – 400 points total)

For this part of your coursework, you will be asked to write four formal analysis papers on situations that require media practitioners to make ethical decisions. The deadlines for each of the four assignments are: Jan. 26, Feb. 11, Feb. 23 and March 8.

I would like you to use the SAD formula (explained in Chapter 3 of your textbook and on the SAD handout) as a framework for each analysis piece.

Each paper must be typed, double spaced (with one-inch margins all around) and approximately 3-4 pages long. More details about these assignments will be distributed in class.

▶ **JOURNAL**

(300 points total)

Your journal will be a collection of writing assignments I will assign during the quarter. Sometimes they will be in-class writing assignments, and sometimes they will require you to choose an ethical dilemma in the news and describe your assessment of the situation. In addition you will be asked to evaluate the ethics involved in certain advertisements and public relations campaigns.

Your journal will be handed in and evaluated twice during the quarter. The first deadline is Feb. 16 and is for all journal assignments through Feb. 11. It will be worth 100 points.

The second deadline is March 10 and is for all assignments from Feb. 16 through the last day of class. It will be worth 200 points.

▶ **GROUP PRESENTATION**

(100 points)

The required group project during the quarter will be a role playing exercise based on a case study. You and your group will be responsible for assuming the roles of the moral agents in a particular case study and presenting the situation to the rest of the class. Then, you will facilitate a discussion about the ethical issues involved. The due date for this assignment is Feb 25. You will have limited class time to plan your presentation with your group.

More details will be distributed in class on Feb. 11.

▶ **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION AND ONLINE DISCUSSIONS**

(100 points)

It is essential that you read and review the assignments BEFORE each class period. As stated previously, class attendance is required. You also will be expected to participate in class and in online discussions. Our online discussions will involve students from communication schools throughout the world and will take place on the Estlow Center's community board – [estlowcenter.du.edu](http://estlowcenter.du.edu). More details will be provided in class.

▶ **QUIZZES**

(100 points)

Quizzes will be worth 10-25 points each and will cover the assigned readings and/or topics covered in class. Keep in mind that quizzes may be unannounced.

## ▶ CLASS CALENDAR

### **CLASS ONE: MONDAY, JAN. 5**

**Lecture/discussion:**

Introduction to the course of study

Introduction to media ethics

“Doing Ethics” video

*Reflective writing:* What are media ethics?

### **CLASS TWO: WEDNESDAY, JAN. 7**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 1 “Ethics and Moral Development”
- Chapter 2 “Ethics and Society”

Read handouts:

- “Reporters and the Law”
- “Unprotected Speech”

Post online comment about reporters’ ethical decisions during wartime. (We’ll go over the registration procedures for our community board during class.) The link to our discussion forum can be accessed from the Estlow Center home page: <http://estlowcenter.du.edu>.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Understanding the law vs. ethics vs. moral reasoning

Why do we need a system of ethics?

### **CLASS THREE: MONDAY, JAN. 12**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 3 “Ethics and Moral Reasoning”

Read handouts:

- Moral Reasoning (SAD) Formula
- The Potter Box
- Questions that lead to ethical decisions

Prepare for quiz on all material (reading, lectures, etc.) covered so far

**Lecture/discussion:**

Models of moral reasoning

Explanation of first formal analysis paper - Due Jan. 26

**CLASS FOUR: WEDNESDAY, JAN. 14**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 4 “Truth and Honesty in Media Communications”

Read online:

- “Investigative Journalism” at <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/wwwhspmapinv.html>
- Tony Kovaleski bio at <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/denvers7/791685/detail.html>

**Lecture/discussion:**

Ethics and investigative journalism

Guest speaker, Tony Kovaleski, investigative reporter, 7News

*Reflective writing:* Apply moral reasoning the work of Tony Kovaleski

**NO CLASS: MONDAY, JAN. 19**

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY**

**CLASS FIVE: WEDNESDAY, JAN. 21**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 5 “The Media and Privacy: A Delicate Balance”

Read handouts:

- Ethical Considerations
- Canons of Journalism

Post online comment about the necessity of ethics.

Prepare for quiz on today’s reading.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Truth, honesty and privacy in media communications

“When Good Journalists Do Bad Things” video

*Reflective writing:* Your reactions to the Dateline NBC report discussed today

**CLASS SIX: MONDAY, JAN. 26**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 6 “Confidentiality and the Public Interest”
- Chapter 7 “Conflicts of Interest”

Complete first formal analysis paper of ONE case study at the end of Chapters 4 or 5.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Confidentiality and the public interest; conflicts of interest

*Reflective writing:* YOUR definition of a conflict of interest.

**CLASS SEVEN: WEDNESDAY, JAN. 28**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Appendix 1: “Society of Professional Journalists: Code of Ethics”
- Appendix 2: “American Advertising Federation: Advertising Principles of American Business”
- Appendix 3: “Public Relations Society of America: Code of Professional Standards”

Read handouts:

- Radio and Television News Directors Association Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct
- National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics
- *The New York Times*: Guidelines on Our Integrity
- Associated Press Managing Editors Code of Ethics
- American Society of Newspaper Editors Statement of Principles
- The *Salem Statesman-Journal* “Thou Shalt Not”
- The ILPC’s Ethics and Motivation

Find and bring a printout of a written news story or photograph that you believe involved ethical decision making on the part of the reporter. Come prepared to describe the situation to the class.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Codes of Ethics

Students present reporting examples

*Reflective writing:* Creating your own code of ethics

**CLASS EIGHT: MONDAY FEB. 2**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 8 “Economic Pressures and Social Responsibility”

Read online:

“Is it news, ad or infomercial?” by Doreen Carvajal, <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/isnews.html>  
“Games publishers play,” by Dave Wright, <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/games.html>

Prepare for quiz on today’s reading

**Lecture/discussion:**

Economic Pressures and Social Responsibility

**CLASS NINE: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 9 “The Media and Antisocial Behavior”
- Chapter 10 “Morally Offensive Content: Freedom and Responsibility”

Read online:

• “And then he said \*&%\*!!!: When sexist and vulgar remarks are news” by Liz Brensinger  
<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/vulgar.html>

Post online comment Topic to be announced in class on Feb. 2

**Lecture/discussion:**

The Media and Antisocial Behavior

Morally Offensive Content: Freedom and Responsibility

*Reflective writing:* How do you define what is morally offensive?

**CLASS TEN: MONDAY, FEB. 9**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Explore/read online:

- “Shattered Glass” movie site, [http://www.shatteredglassmovie.com/index\\_flash.html](http://www.shatteredglassmovie.com/index_flash.html)

Listen online:

- NPR interview with former editor of The New Republic, Charles Lane  
[http://freshair.npr.org/day\\_fa.jhtml?display=day&todayDate=11/17/2003](http://freshair.npr.org/day_fa.jhtml?display=day&todayDate=11/17/2003)

**Lecture/discussion:**

“Shattered Glass” movie.

A timely true tale of a reporter for The New Republic who makes up the “news” as he goes along, Shattered Glass explores the ethics of journalism and the people who move, shake and crack up in the news magazine world. Length: 1 hour, 34 minutes.

**CLASS ELEVEN: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read online:

- “The Jayson Blair Project : How did he bamboozle the New York Times?” by Jack Shafer  
<http://slate.msn.com/id/2082741>

Listen online:

- “Ethics in Journalism” from the NPR archive, <http://discover.npr.org/features/feature.jhtml?wflid=1261969>

Complete second formal analysis paper of ONE case study at the end of Chapter 7.

**Lecture/discussion:**

“Shattered Glass” video discussion

Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair and fabricated stories.

*Reflective writing:* Ethics and honesty in journalism

Distribution of group editing projects

**CLASS TWELVE: MONDAY FEB. 16**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Proofread and compile journal to hand in today.

Read through your assigned ethical situation for presentation.

Read online:

Novak: ‘No great crime’ with leak,’ <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/09/29/novak.cia/>

**Lecture/discussion:**

Ethical considerations and confidential information

“Shattered Glass” video discussion

Details of the group ethical situations for presentation

*Reflective writing:* When is it appropriate to use confidential information?

**CLASS THIRTEEN: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 18**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 11 “Media Content and Juveniles: Special Ethical Concerns”

View online:

- Pulitzer prize winning photos from the *Rocky Mountain News*

<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/> (Under Photography, click on Pulitzer photos)

- Columbine: When News and Emotion Converge, by Rochelle Lewis Lavin, news editor, Poynter.org, [http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=3560](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=3560)

**Lecture/discussion:**

Media Content and Juveniles: Special Ethical Concerns

Ethics in the coverage of the Columbine high school story

*Reflective writing:* Your reactions to the Columbine coverage almost four years later.

**CLASS FOURTEEN: THURSDAY, FEB. 19, 9:30-10:45 A.M.**

**SOC SUMMIT PANEL**

***Breaking the News: The Ethics of Collecting Information***

Does admitting biases absolve journalists from being fair, accurate and balanced in their reporting? Does uncovering a dangerous situation justify invading a person's privacy? Come hear professional journalists share some of their toughest ethical dilemmas and discuss with them instances where right and wrong were not readily apparent.

*Reflective writing:* Your reactions to today's panel discussion.

**CLASS FIFTEEN: MONDAY, FEB. 23**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

- Chapter 12 “Media Practitioners and Social Justice”

Read online:

“Washington's Scandals Spotlight Journalistic Ethics, Too,”

<http://search.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/03/18/opin/column.1.html>

Complete Third formal analysis paper of ONE ethical situation in “Shattered Glass” or in Chapter 10

**Lecture/discussion:**

Media and social justice

“Journalism and Justice: The Media and the O.J. Simpson Case”

Class time to work on your group presentations

**CLASS SIXTEEN: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 25**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Post online comment about media ethics issue from the SOC Summit panel, “Breaking the News”  
Prepare your group presentation for today’s class.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Presentations

*Reflective writing:* on any of today’s class presentations

**CLASS SEVENTEEN: MONDAY, MARCH 1**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read online:

“Not the straight story: Can misleading readers ever be justified?” by David Gross

<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/notstraight.html>

“Betraying a trust,” by Mary Beausoleil, <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/betray.html>

**Lecture/discussion:**

Finish presentations (if necessary)

The ethics of telling the “truth”

*Reflective writing:* about the “truth”

**CLASS EIGHTEEN: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

Read textbook:

• Chapter 13 “Stereotypes in Media Communications”

Read online:

• “Talking Race Over a Slice of Watermelon,” by Keith M. Woods

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=58&aid=42722>

• ‘Priest Scandal Reinforces Anti-Gay Stereotypes,’

<http://www.365gay.com/NewsContent/091403priestRxn.htm>

• “Doing your own ethics audit” by Deni Elliott, <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/ethicsaud.html>

Read handout:

• Humor Triangle

**Lecture/discussion:**

Stereotypes in Media Communications

*Reflective writing:* Exploring stereotypes

**CLASS NINETEEN: MONDAY, MARCH 8**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

**Read online:**

“Journalists face the challenges of wartime ethics: Journalists pay the consequences of revealing too much,” <http://www.silha.umn.edu/spring2003.htm#pay>

“Inside View,” by Peter Baker, <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=2993>

“TV Combat Fatigue on the Rise,” <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=178>

Find and bring to class an example of an ethical situation related to media coverage of the U.S. war against terrorism. This example could be an ad or a news story or any other form of communication. Come to class prepared to talk about the ethics involved.

Complete fourth formal analysis paper of ONE case study at the end of Chapter 12.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Embedded reporters and other ethical issues during wartime

*Reflective writing (final journal entry):* What are media ethics?

**CLASS TWENTY: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10**

**To prepare for this class (due BEFORE class begins):**

**Read online:**

• “Online journalism ethics: A new frontier,” by Joann Byrd

<http://www.journalism.org/resources/tools/ethics/codes/newfrontier.asp>

**Listen online:**

• “Ethics of the Kobe Bryant coverage,” <http://estlowcenter.du.edu>

(scroll down the page to the item on Kobe Bryant)

Post online comment about a topic to be announced in class on March 8.

Prepare for quiz on today’s reading

Proofread and compile journal to hand in today.

**Lecture/discussion:**

Ethics and new media

Quarter overview and wrap-up