



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Media Ethics Spring Semester 2009

Author(s)

Elaine Englehardt

Description

Syllabus of a media ethics course developed and taught by Dr. Elaine Englehardt of Utah Valley State University. Includes goals of course, class schedule, and description of class papers and assignments.

Body

[Download the pdf](#)

Media Ethics Spring Semester 2009

Senior Seminar in Media Ethics Case Studies in Journalism Professor Elaine Englehardt

Syllabus:

As professionals in media disciplines, we can not take for granted that dramatic increases in ethnic, gender, personal, nationalistic, and a score of other conflicts persuade us that getting along with each other is of primary importance. The fact is, billions of people somehow have to learn to live together, and the morality of our behavior will determine the quality of lives on the planet. Media ethics is particularly important because it is one of the few areas in professional ethics in which those who practice the crafts are asked, even required, to think for themselves and make their own decisions. This is called accepting the responsibility to be an autonomous moral agent. Partial dedication in this book is to all the thoughtful journalists, broadcasters, public relations people and advertising industry workers who bring introspection to what they do, and to the impact they have on their audiences. We hope this book will help provide foundations for the decisions, and help feed the introspection to the ends of better media and a better society.

It is clear that the media are often responsible for, and most visible in, responding to the multitude of situations that test tolerance and patience and our overall ability to get along with each other. Every culture and subculture and billions of human beings must each somehow pursue their own dreams, while at the same time treading carefully so that others may also have their own freedom. Professional communicators—journalists, broadcasters, advertising and public relations people, and newly-minted cyber-communicators, are morally obligated to track their own lives, provide a viable social service, and avoid trampling others in the rush.

At the end of the semester each student can answer or write on these course objectives:

1. In a media system that grants great personal autonomy, goals or desires of individuals must sometimes yield to the legitimate needs of others.
2. The social tolerance that allows individual freedom, while not giving each one license to exploit others, does provide individuals with an optimal ability to go ways of their own choosing. Can individuals exploit the system, while expecting the entire media system to remain a credible profession for their practice?
3. On what basis does the individual journalist or public relations professional make crucial decisions such as whether to use a hidden camera during an interview, whether to report a suicide, or whether to fail to warn customers about product problems? This is where ethical decision making is of vital importance.

4. Consider how to persuade, inform or entertain through the mass media and to accommodate diversity and deal conflicts inherent in social interactions.
5. Understand current problems in corporate mergers, absentee ownerships and overriding profit motives. These problems have an undoubted effect on practicing communicators, particularly journalists.
6. Consider how profit minded owners and managers often appear to operate their media units in a self-serving moral vacuum in which accumulation of profit overrides the need society has to be well informed, to make informed decisions.
7. Understand if the business-oriented ownership class seem to follow a different moral star, one which encourages adherence to legal restrictions (often called the morality of compliance) while forming and implementing strategies for maximizing returns for themselves or for their shareholders.
8. Consider conflicting moralities that appear intractably opposed. Solution to this problem awaits, in part, on morally sensitive professional communicators who can marshal cogent arguments in persuading their managers to accept a different set of moral responsibilities for their properties (public service as opposed to maximum profits).
9. Understand that once media workers can make the arguments, they stand a better chance of persuading their owners, and of improving media performance.

The Texts

Elaine E. Englehardt and Ralph D. Barney *Media and Ethics: Principles for Moral Decisions*, Wadsworth 2002.

New York Times - Bring to class daily

Materials Provided by Professor

Grading

<u>Component of Course Grade</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>% of Course Grade</u>
Attendance & Participation in class	100	10%

Quizzes (6 @ 25 points each)	150	15
Project	400	40
Service Learning Project	100	10
Attendance at Ethics Center & other events	50	5
Midterm Examination	100	10
Final Examination	100	10
Totals	1,000	100%

Grades will be based on the following percentages:

A ' 94 - 100% C ' 72 -75%

A- ' 90 - 94% C- ' 68 -72%

B+ ' 86 - 90% D+ ' 65 -68%

B ' 82 - 86% D ' 60 -65%

B- ' 79 - 82% D- ' 57 -60%

C+ ' 75 - 79% E ' 57%

Attendance & Participation

Your attendance and participation will be noted. (100 pts.)

The research assignment is worth a total of 400 points.

This Research/ project assignment is another form of activity that is meant to give you the opportunity to explore in greater depth your reaction to a modern ethical issue and to share your findings with others. With this assignment, you will therefore have the opportunity to do research and analysis on your own and report back to me on what you have done. Finally, you will turn in your analysis and present your findings to the class in an oral presentation with a two page outline.

The following is a summary of factors (and credit assignments) associated with this Assignment:

1. A Topic

Select a project in communication ethics. Write a three page paper on this project complete with four sources to help complete the project. This project can be an in-depth paper; a community internship; or other means of intellectual and professional advancement. This is a 50 pt. assignment and is due on January 26.

2. Methodology:

This assignment is meant to give you the opportunity to deepen your understanding of a particular aspect of communication ethics make sure that you do significant research work on your topic. This means that you will be expected to have read a number of sources, and not just one or two articles or even just one book. You will need to give a brief summary of each source for your project, research paper or internship. Each citation begins with the author's name (or source's name), followed by the title, publisher, place of publication and year. This is a 50 point assignment and is due Feb. 27.

3. Presentation: Outline and Oral Presentation

You will first be presenting your findings to your group, not to the class. Keep in mind that what is important during the oral presentation is how you are communicating your ideas to them. Your oral presentation should last about 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion/and or question-answer session. You will need to provide me and each member of your group an outline of your presentation. This is a 50 point assignment for the presentation and 50 points for the

outline. Total of 100 points for both. Presentations will be on March 9, 11 and 13.

4. Review of Written Analyses

Your rough draft of the project or research paper should be finished by March 17. You should be prepared to have two members of the class read your paper. You must read and respond to the analyses of two class members. This response is a one page detailed paper that is given to the author (one of your classmates) of the analysis, but also turned in to us. Please make sure the author's name and the title are included in your report. These reviews are worth 25 points per review for a total of 50 points. The reviews are due to the authors of the papers as early as possible, but no later than March 30.

5. The Written Result

Your project analysis/ internship description/ research paper should be between eight and ten pages in length, double spaced. This is a senior course, and the paper should reflect a deep understanding of your analysis. You will be utilizing the presentation and drafts that you have prepared to this point. The paper must include a clear approach to how you have analyzed the topic. Thus, there should be a statement of the facts of the situation, the ethical issues, who the primary stakeholders are, what are possible alternative actions, and the ethics of each of these alternatives (bringing to bear various perspectives such as "a "utilitarian" perspective, a "rights" perspective, a "justice" perspective, etc.) And, you should identify any practical constraints that might be present (you need to be realistic!). Finally, you should say what action you think should be taken, with emphasis on which ethical theories make the most sense to you as they relate to this situation. A traditional bibliography will be at the end of the paper. Guidelines will be given in class for a well written paper. The written research paper will be worth 150 points. The written paper will be due on April 13. (150 points for final paper)

Total for Research Assignment Process -----400 points

Service Learning Project

Ethics is often defined as avoiding harm. Another definition is doing good or beneficence. You are required to pick an area of service in the community and spend ten hours in free service. This cannot be your religion or political party. The project is cleared with me through a one page proposal due one week from today (20 pts).

Presentations to the class and discussions will take place on April 13, 15 and 17. (40 points for 2 page description of the project and its ethical implications. 40 pts for presentation). The discussion must focus on the ethical dimensions of the particular project.

Special Presentations in Professional and Business Ethics:

UVSC sponsors numerous speakers and panel discussions which have the focus of ethics in business and the professions. You may attend five of these. Submit a one page analysis of the event you attended. Detail the connections to professional, business or social ethics. You will receive 10 points for attending these out of class activities. I'll give you a schedule of many events that will be held this semester.

Outline

January 7

Introduction to class

January 9, 12, 14, and 16

Chapter One

Topic: Basic Ethics For Media Professionals

Objectives

- To understand ethical decisions

- To learn benefits to media professionals

- To understand the tendency to inflict harm

Five systems for making ethical decisions:

- Duty

- Divine Command

- Deontology

- Lying and Deception as Immoral

- Utilitarianism

- Rights

- Veil of Ignorance: Understanding the Most Disadvantaged Position

- Principles of Justice

- Virtue

Relationships

Relativism

January 14 class will be part of the Martin Luther King Conference

January 19: Martin Luther King Holiday

January 21, 23

Chapter Two

Objectives

Why Study Ethics?

Rules vs. Principles

Develop a personal moral theory

Moral Goal To Do Good

The Persuader's Goal: Choosing from a Variety of Moral Goals

Pressures on Values

Values on Several Levels

January 26, 28, 30

Chapter Three

Topic: Ethics and The Powerful Impact of Information on Society

Objectives:

The power of information

Secure Ethical Decisions

Is this information important?

Establishing boundaries

How does information affect society?

When new rules come along

Is Deceptive information harmless?

Using information to improve democracy

Information as Socially acceptable harm

Power

February 2, 4, 6

Chapter Four

Topic: The Politics of Media Decisions: Who Wins, the Individual or the Community

Objectives:

What Are Liberalism and Communitarianism?

Should Media Use the Power of Persuasion

Today's Liberalism

Today's Communitarianism

Blending the Philosophies

Practical Uses for These Theories

February 9, 11, 13

Chapter Five

Topic: Media Decisions and Public Perception

Objectives:

What causes tense social relationships with media?

Dependence on Media

Self-Serving Actions and Suspicions About the Media

A democratic media system is not comfortable

Media Affects Distribution and Acquisition of Power and Information

Those With Power, Those Without Power

Which social groups are in conflict?

Media's response to the conflict

Publishing Information Does Redistribute Power

Red Light or Green Light

Children's Attitudes About Media

Rumors

Protect the Innocent Who Cannot Handle Information Well

Persuaders: finding common ground

Minimizing the harm of media information

Public Image and Power

February 16: President's Day

February 18, 20

Chapter Six

Topic: Journalism Ethics

Objectives:

The journalist in cyberspace

Social Responsibility and the journalist

Setting a Baseline of Media Expectations
Business needs in journalism
Retaining Audience
Economic Discord Between Journalists and Advertisers
The Ethical Journalist
The ideal pluralist
Provide Accuracy of Facts and Context
Deception
Privacy and Classes of Citizens
Confidentiality
Conflict of interest
The Importance of Disclosure
Diversity
Ethics and the Law

February 23, 25, 27

Topic: Ethics and the Law

Objectives:

Journalists as Intermediaries for Sources and Audience
Journalism and the courts
Ensuring Fair Trials Amid Media Publicity
Reluctant Sources: Business and Police
Social Elements of Fairness
Checklist for Ethical Decision Making: Journalism

March 2, 16, 23 - Chapter 7

March 4, and 6 - no class - work on service learning projects

Chapter Seven

Topic: Advertising and Public Relations: Ethical Persuasion

Objectives:

Persuasion: A morally acceptable game
Competition Is Key
Less Than Strictly Factual Information
Presenting a Credible Truth
Identifying Boundaries

The Philosophers on lying
Government Lies
Acts of Good Will
When All Lies Are Harmful
Leaking the Truth: The Whistle Blower
Societal concerns about persuaders
Receiving Reliable and Valid Information
Trusting the Messenger
The Moral Limits of Advocating for the Client
How Decisions Influence the Culture

March 9, 11, 13

Presentations of Writing Project

March 18 and 20 - Spring Break

March 25, 27, 30

Chapter Eight

Topic: The History and Future of Media Ethics

Objectives:

History
The Age of Sensationalism
Yellow Journalism
The Muckrakers
Ethical Reforms in media and academics
The Ethical Legacy of the 1920s
The Basics about Codes of Ethics
No Binding Code of Ethics
Support for Binding Codes of Ethics
Freedom of the Press: Hutchins Commission
Modern Media Ethics
Public Relations and Advertising Sources
Cyberspace
Issues of Internet Access
Cyberdemocracy

April 1, 3

Discussions on John Rawls - materials will be supplied

April 6, 8

Discussions on Liberalism and Communitarianism- materials will be supplied

April 10

Discussions on Thomas Hobbes - materials will be supplied

April 13, 15, 17

Service Learning Presentations

April 20, 22

Review for Final

Notes

Author(s): Elaine Englehardt, Utah Valley University.

Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Instructor Materials

Parent Collection

Syllabi

Topics

Confidentiality

Conflict of Interest

Discipline(s)

Communications

Social and Behavioral Sciences