

COMM 431: Communication Ethics

Online – Spring 2015 – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich, Ph.D.

Office Hours: With an online class, it is hard to set aside a time for office hours that works for everybody. If you need to talk, please email me three times that work for you. We can meet over Skype or on the phone.

Phone: 701-541-3608. Please try to call between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. Mondays-Fridays. If I don't answer, please leave a message and your phone number and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

Email: dennis.o.frohlich@ndsou.edu

Required Texts

Arnett, R. C., Fritz, J. H., & Bell, L. M. (2008). *Communication ethics literacy: Dialogue and difference*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Christians, C.G., Fackler, M., Richardson, K. B., Kreshel, P.J., & Woods, R. H. (2011). *Media ethics: Cases and moral reasoning (9th edition)*. Pearson.

From time to time online readings may also be required. When these readings are added to the syllabus, you will be notified of the changes via email.

Bulletin Description

Study of ethical theories and their role in conceptions of mass media responsibility. Capstone course. Restricted to Communication professional majors and minors.

Course Objectives and Description

Any time you communicate—whether interpersonally, through mediated digital technologies, interculturally, or in professional contexts—you open the door to ethical quandaries. Every message you craft has a purpose and aim. How you accomplish that goal is the substance of ethics.

Is it ethical to withhold information about a health epidemic because such information might scare people and send them into a panic if they knew it? If your friend is about to make a bad life choice, is it more ethical to tell the truth that they are making a bad decision, and risk hurting their feelings, or to support them in their decision no matter what, even though you'd have to lie to do this? As a business owner, do you tell your customers that your product might be unsafe, even though doing so will damage your company, devalue your stock, and will lead to employees losing their jobs?

The beginning of ethics is figuring out what is right and what is wrong, establishing moral principles upon which to base future action. However, ethics is not a set of rules that must be rigidly adhered to: even within cohesive ethical systems, problems arise when two or more moral principles come in conflict with each other. As the above three scenarios illustrate, the ethical principle of Telling the Truth is often in conflict with the ethical principle Do No Harm.

Additionally, not every person involved in a communicative scenario holds to the same ethical principles, which makes communicating ethically even more challenging. In this course, you will learn how to identify the foundation of your personal ethics, and learn how your ethics are applied in various practical scenarios.

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Explicate what your ethical principles are
- Discuss, defend, and critique the communicative decisions made in practical ethical scenarios
- Articulate how to balance conflicting ethical principles in real-world communicative situations

Class Meetings

Because this class is online, there are no set meeting times. There are, however, assignments, readings, and lectures every week. To be successful in this course, get into a habit of logging into Blackboard at least a couple times a week. Also check your email frequently in case any changes are made.

Assignments

Your grade will be based on the following assignments. More descriptive assignment sheets for each assignment are located on Blackboard.

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| Personal Ethical Principles Essay | 100 points |
| Discussion Boards (8): | 600 points |
| Case Studies (4): | 200 points |
| Career Ethics Essay: | 100 points |
| Total: | 1,000 points |

Grading

Grading will be based on the following scale:

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| A | 900-1,000 points |
| B | 800-899 points |
| C | 700-799 points |
| D | 600-699 points |
| F | 0-599 points |

The grading scale is non-negotiable. A final grade of 899, for instance, is a B. All grades are final unless questions about grades are addressed in writing within **2 weeks** after the grade is posted. If you have concerns about your grades please check with me *sooner* in the semester rather than *later*.

Late Work

You will have a 10-minute grace period for each assignment to account for possible issues when uploading your assignment, after which time the assignment will be considered late. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit assignments. Due dates are clearly listed in the course schedule. Assignments turned in late will be accepted for half-credit. Late work will **only** be accepted for **24 hours** after the due date. Work turned in later than 24 hours will not be accepted.

Under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the instructor was notified in advance, an exception may be made.

Academic Honesty

All work completed for this course must respect the intellectual property of others. When using somebody else's copyrighted material, whether words, images, media, or ideas, proper credit must be given. If direct quotations are used, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and properly cited. If copyrighted material is used indirectly, it must still be properly cited!

If in doubt, include a citation. If you have any questions at all, ask your instructor *before* the assignment is submitted. *Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse!*

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty

Special Needs

Any students with disabilities or other special needs who need special accommodations in this course are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact the Disability Services office (www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices) as soon as possible.

If you become sick during the course of the semester, or have some major personal crisis going on, please let me know as soon as possible so I can help you work around it. When I was an undergraduate, I was very sick one semester and missed a lot of classes, but my professors were willing to work with me. I'm sensitive to these issues and am willing to work with you, but if you don't tell me there's a problem I can't help you.

Course Schedule

The current version of the course syllabus will be uploaded to Blackboard with the revision date included in the title

| Week | Date | Topics | Assignments/Readings |
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| Module 1: Foundations of Communication Ethics | | | |
| 1 | Jan. 12 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are Communication Ethics Needed? • The Challenge of Communication Ethics • The Goal of Communication Ethics • Course Overview | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Preface and Chapter 1 |
| 2 | Jan. 19 (M) | MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY (No class Monday) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting Communication Theory and Practice • Communication Narratives: The Case of Ferguson, MO • Communication Narratives: The Case of Kim Kardashian | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Chapter 2 Assign: Personal Ethical Principles Essay due by 1/25 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 3 | Jan. 26 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • America and Democratic Communication Ethics • Resisting Relativism in Contextual Communication Ethics • The Role of Learning in Practicing Ethics | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Chapters 3 and 4 Assign: Discussion Board 1 due by 2/1 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 4 | Feb. 2 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogic Ethics | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Chapter 5 Assign: Discussion Board 2 due by 2/8 at 11:59 p.m. |
| Module 2: Communication Ethics Applications | | | |
| 5 | Feb. 9 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics in the Public and Private Spheres | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Chapters 6 and 7 Assign: Case Study 1 due by 2/15 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 6 | Feb. 16 (M) | PRESIDENTS' DAY (No class Monday) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Ethics | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: Chapter 8 Assign: Discussion Board 3 due by 2/22 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 7 | Feb. 23 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural Ethics | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i>: |

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| | | | Chapter 9 Assign: Discussion Board 4 due by 3/1 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 8 | Mar. 2 (M) | • Business and Professional Ethics | Read: • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i> : Chapter 10 Assign: Case Study 2 due by 3/8 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 9 | Mar. 9 (M) | • Health and Crisis Ethics | Read: • <i>Communication Ethics Literacy</i> : Chapters 11 and 12 Assign: Discussion Board 5 due by 3/15 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 10 | Mar. 16 (M) | SPRING BREAK WEEK! | NO ASSIGNMENTS! |
| Module 3: Mass Media Ethics | | | |
| 11 | Mar. 23 (M) | • News Ethics | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 1 and 2 Assign: Discussion Board 6 due by 3/29 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 12 | Mar. 30 (M) | • Ethics of the Reporter | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 3-5 Assign: Case Study 3 due by 4/5 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 13 | Apr. 6 (M) | SPRING RECESS (No classes Friday or Monday) • Advertising Ethics | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 6-8 Assign: • NO ASSIGNMENT! |
| 14 | Apr. 13 (M) | • Public Relations Ethics | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 9-11 Assign: Discussion Board 7 due by 4/19 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 15 | Apr. 20 (M) | • Social Responsibility | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 12-13 Assign: Discussion Board 8 due by 4/26 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 16 | Apr. 27 (M) | • Media Effects | Read: • <i>Media Ethics</i> : Chapters 14-15 Assign: Case Study 4 due by 5/3 at 11:59 p.m. |

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| 17 | May 4 (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Censorship | Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Media Ethics</i>: Chapters 16-17 Assign: Career Ethics Essay due by 5/10 at 11:59 p.m. |
| 18 | May 11 (M) | FINALS WEEK | NO ASSIGNMENTS! COURSE CONCLUDES! |
| 19 | May 21 (Th) | Final grades are viewable online | |