

Communication 367, sec. 001: Ethical Problems in Communication

FALL 2026 T/R 2-3:15 p.m.

ABOUT ME....

Professor: Dr. K. Megan Hopper, Ph.D. (pronouns: she/her/hers)

Office: 413 Fell Hall

Email: khopper@ilstu.edu

Student Hours: Feel free to come visit me in my office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-5 p.m. or other days/times by request.

Ask me about: Anything pop culture related, my love of the Chicago Cubs, getting into and attending graduate school, being a journalist, anything about this class and how you can succeed in it.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Christians, C.G., Fackler, M., Richardson, K.B., & Kreshel, P.J. (2020). *Media Ethics: Cases & Moral Reasoning*. 11th Ed. New York: Routledge

Free eBook found here via Milner Library:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ilstu/detail.action?docID=6145625>

You will also be responsible for any **readings and web links posted on our course Canvas site.**

WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE THIS COURSE?

This course is designed to facilitate your application of ethical principles to situations you will encounter in the real world as media professionals. Throughout the course of the semester, you will learn to identify a range of ethical issues present in professional situations. Through critical thinking and analysis, you will practice navigating the difficult choices and the ethical consequences associated with those choices that often face professionals in the fields of journalism, political communication, advertising, public relations, and entertainment.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN IN THIS COURSE?

At the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Recognize major ethical frameworks and be able to apply them to situations that are often present in the media profession.
2. Employ the analytical steps involved in creative ethical analysis.
3. Identify the guiding principles and standards that media professionals adhere to.
4. Explore your existing ethical beliefs and how they may relate to your critical analysis of ethical problems in the mass communication profession.

5. More purposefully and critically consume media with a deeper ethical awareness.
6. Make socially responsible decisions and justify them ethically.
7. Argue your position on ethical issues in a professional and civil manner.
8. Develop and apply your own code of ethics.

Course Format: This course will be run in a hybrid format. We will meet in person in our assigned classroom in Fell Hall on Tuesdays and on Thursdays, you will be responsible for posting to an online discussion forum and/or submitting an assignment via Canvas. Assignments you must complete are summarized below in the “Assignments” section. Details about each assignment will be shared separately and posted on Canvas. See the course schedule below for information on the days we will have class in person and the days in which we **DO NOT** meet at a certain time and you will need to complete asynchronous or out of class assignments in place of class. See the course schedule below for information on the days you are required to complete these asynchronous activities and assignments.

Student Expectations: The following information outlines what is expected from you, the student learner, in this course.

1. You are expected to attend this course and participate in the course on a regular basis. You should access course material every day to remain current and make sure you are aware of any changes in the course. Changes will be posted in announcements. Please see specific details about attendance below.
2. Collaborating with other students enriches your learning activities. The course is designed to encourage and reward collaboration. Therefore, you are expected to work as a team on your film critique assignment as well as to participate in discussion forums and contribute to the body of knowledge for this subject throughout the course.
3. You may communicate with me via e-mail, telephone, Zoom, or in person. For this course you must use ISU’s e-mail system. My e-mail is listed on the first page of this syllabus, in the university’s faculty directory, the department’s website, and my profile in Canvas. You may also ask your fellow students for assistance except when I instruct you not to.
4. You are expected to remain civil and polite in all communications. Although disagreements and dissent should be part of learning, you must remain respectful to other participants and me. You will carefully monitor your use of language while in person, online or in official communication with other participants.
5. You are expected to contribute your own work and to properly cite the works of others submitted in the course. You will honor privacy among other students. You will be especially sensitive to honoring copyright and not committing plagiarism. When in doubt, you are better served by providing a link to an online source, rather than copying it into your own work.

Online Communication: I use e-mail to communicate directly to you as an individual and as a class. Also check the “Announcements” area on Canvas. *Not checking your e-mail or Canvas announcements is not grounds for any excuse for not doing or not doing*

well on any assignment. It's your responsibility to (1) keep your e-mail accounts open and up-to-date and (2) monitor your e-mail and Canvas class announcements frequently.

Student Support: For technical and academic assistance, as well as other student support services, please visit <https://ctl.illinoisstate.edu/pedagogy/onlinecourses/learner/>

ASSIGNMENTS:

You are expected to read the assigned readings by the date listed on the course schedule in the following pages, and always feel well prepared to participate in class discussions and individual activities. Late work is accepted but will be penalized.

Reflection Assignments: As this course is “hybrid”, we will only meet in person on Tuesdays. On three Thursdays this semester, you will be responsible for completing a reflection assignment on the week’s topic of discussion. See the course schedule for the specific dates and corresponding assignments you are required to complete in place of meeting in person.

Discussion Leadership: You will be assigned a class session in which you will submit a detailed summary of the assigned readings for that day as well as bring in 4 discussion questions you will pose to your classmates during that class session. In addition, you will be responsible for finding current media examples related to the topic and summarizing/discussing them with the rest of the class.

Case Analyses & Discussion Forum Posts: You will be required to find, describe, and analyze 3 current mass communication controversies with ethical implications. You need to complete a case analysis related to the: 1.) News/Journalism profession, 2.) Advertising profession, and 3.) Public Relations profession using the analytical tools learned in class. Details of the assignments and examples of high-quality case analyses for each unit are posted under Files on Canvas. These case analyses will be due on three Thursdays this semester during which we will not have in person class, but you will be responsible for posting a summary of your case analyses to a corresponding discussion forum on Canvas as well as reading and providing feedback on your classmates’ summaries of their case analyses. More details can be found under Assignments on Canvas.

Intellectual Property Paper: Due to the multi-faceted nature of intellectual property, it holds great importance in media content creation, distribution, and consumption. Further, intellectual property is fundamental to media ethics because it provides media creators with protections from their work being stolen as well as ensuring they are fairly compensated for their work. It also sets boundaries for ethical actions in terms of how we distribute other’s content and the affordability, or lack thereof, and equitability of the consumption of media content. For this paper, you will explore the ethics of intellectual property within the entertainment media industry. More details can be found under Assignments on Canvas.

Personal Code of Ethics: Based upon the readings and discussion you have been exposed to throughout this course, you will prepare a code of ethics outlining your own personal standards for professional, ethical conduct. This paper will be due on the last day of class during which you will also be responsible for posting a summary of your code to a corresponding discussion forum on Canvas as well as reading and providing feedback on your classmates' summaries of their codes. More details can be found under Assignments on Canvas.

Expectations for Paper Assignments:

The writing assignments in this course are meant to (1) apply principles and concepts covered in this course to realistic problems and (2) build upon and challenge you to improve your current skill level—to be more consistent with “real world” demands for written work.

You cannot say absolutely everything you can in a paper, so you must learn to edit your writing to fit space and length requirements. The formatting rules for your papers are given below. Failure to follow any of these rules will adversely affect your assignment's grade; whereas, a one or more grade reduction will be imposed based on the extent and severity of formatting errors.

- Page layout for an entire paper must be in “portrait” orientation, not “landscape.”
- 1-inch margins all around for the main text of your paper all pages (set headers and footers at ½ inch *inside* top and bottom margins).
- Number all pages in the upper right corner of the header, and include your last name with the page number.
- Double-space text throughout.
- 12-point Times New Roman type throughout, including headers.
- Indent all paragraphs ½ inch for the first line only. Do not have any extra space between paragraphs.
- Use a cover page with the title of your paper, your name, the course title, and due date.
- Do not write an abstract for your papers, as the style manuals suggest.
- If you use any secondary sources (including readings from class in the textbook or posted on Canvas), you must document them according to MLA or APA style in the text and in a list of references.
- Only the number of pages assigned will be graded. Papers longer than the page limit will receive one full grade reduction, and more than one-half page shorter than the page limit will result in the same penalty.

For your own protection, you are expected to keep electronic copies and/or photocopies of all assignments submitted to me. As you work on any computer remember to save your work frequently, always backup your work, and always protect your files and computer from viruses and malicious software.

Detailed instructions for assignments will be posted on Canvas.

Criteria for evaluation:

50 pts	News Case Analysis Paper
50 pts	Advertising Case Analysis Paper
50 pts	PR Case Analysis Paper
50 pts	Intellectual Property Paper
50 pts	Discussion Leadership
50 pts	Participation & Attendance
50 pts	Reflection Assignments
<u>50 pts</u>	<u>Personal Code of Ethics Paper</u>
400 pts	Total

GENERAL NOTES ON CLASS POLICIES:

Attendance: While this class meets both in person and online, you are still required to meet assignment and discussion forum deadlines, as well as routinely check in on our course Canvas site for any announcements and discussion posts. As this course includes group work, you are also required to attend and participate in any and all group meetings (which may all occur virtually) and do your fair share on all group assignments. You are responsible for attending class and completing all academic work. As per university policy: Be familiar with [which absences are excused under university policy and which are not](#). You are responsible for making arrangements with me to complete missed coursework after an excused absence. Follow the instructions in this syllabus about any additional absences I excuse for this class. If you need advice on how to manage an extended absence or want notification of your absence sent to your instructors, contact the [Dean of Students Office](#).

Diversity & Respect: ISU remains committed to creating and maintaining a working, learning and living environment that is welcoming, supportive, respectful, inclusive, diverse and free from discrimination and harassment. Please be kind and courteous to everyone you interact with both in and out of class and respect diverse viewpoints.

Here in the School of Communication, I am a member of the Anti-Racism, Social Justice, and Coalition-Building Committee (ASC) that is here for you if ever you experience issues related to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and respect. Feel free to reach out to me!!

In addition, the Inclusive Community Response Team (ICRT) serves students by fostering an open and inclusive campus and responding to instances of hate and bias. You can learn more about how the team can help and report concerns on the [ICRT website](#). The Multicultural Outreach Team (MCOT) is a group of staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students in Student Counseling Services dedicated to fostering an equitable, diverse, and inclusive university community for our minoritized students. MCOT offers workshops which promote dialogue about identity, empathy, stereotypes,

bias, privilege, power, white supremacy, and systemic racism. Students can learn more about MCOT at [https://counseling.illinoisstate.edu/outreach/multicultural-outreach-team/Multicultural Center](https://counseling.illinoisstate.edu/outreach/multicultural-outreach-team/Multicultural-Center): The Multicultural Center provides a number of programs and services to help students flourish academically and socially and to encourage understanding, appreciation, and respect for diversity in the University community. Resources include LGBTQAI+ resources, legal resources for undocumented students, healing and self-care resources, anti-racism education, leadership development, cultural organizations (BSU, ALAS, TRIBE, PRIDE and APAC), and lots of gathering space!

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the [Code of Student Conduct](#) and any additional syllabus language. All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and/or unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else's work, is plagiarism. Content generated by an Artificial Intelligence third-party service or site (AI-generated content) without proper attribution or authorization is another form of plagiarism. If you are unsure about whether something may be plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty, please reach out to me to discuss it as soon as possible. Any allegation of academic dishonesty may be referred to [Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities](#), a unit of the Dean of Students Office, for possible review. If found responsible for academic dishonesty, a grade penalty can also be applied.

Student Access & Accommodations: Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 308 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, Video Phone [\(309\) 319-7682](tel:309-319-7682) or visit the website StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Mental Health and Well-Being: Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. It's hard to learn if you're hungry or couch surfing. If you are having difficulty affording groceries, accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or securing a safe and stable place to live, help may be available. Please contact the Dean of Student's Office to learn more. Other helpful resources include:

- [Student Counseling Services](#) (SCS) is FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at counseling.illinoisstate.edu or by calling (309) 438-3655.
- [Planned Parenthood, Bloomington](#) offers abortion care, contraception, pregnancy testing, STI treatments, transgender hormone therapy, and more. 1319 N. Veterans Parkway, Bloomington, IL. Phone: (309) 827-2204.
- [The School Street Food Pantry](#). Students suffering from food insecurity can get groceries at the School Street Food Pantry. For more information and hours visit their website.

Extra Credit Opportunities:

There will be a few extra credit opportunities for research participation. The extra credit points will be added to your final grade, and may not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity. There are no guarantees for extra credit, and it is each student's responsibility to be aware of and take advantage of such opportunities. **ONE** such opportunity is through participating in any **ONE** of the studies in the School of Communication's Research Study Announcement Board. The research board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the board and be aware of available opportunities. The Research Board can be accessed via:

<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/>

In general, each 30 minutes of participation in an extra credit study will earn you .5 Research Credits, but please see the call for participants for the Research Credits associated with each study. Each Research Credit is worth an additional 5 points toward your total possible final grade in this course. For example, if you participate in a research study worth .5 Research Credit, your participation would provide 5 points to your final grade. Each project listed on the Research Announcement Board will indicate the specific number of Research Credits associated with the project. The course instructor will get evidence of participation and the time of participation from the researcher(s) who administer the research studies at the conclusion of the semester; however, it is your responsibility to make sure that the researchers have the necessary evidence of your participation at the time of the study. Before participating in a study, please be sure to have your name, ULID (i.e., the part of your email before @ilstu.edu), instructor name, and course and section number ready, as you will need to provide these to receive credit. Research Credit can only be applied to one course for each study, unless specified otherwise on the Research Announcement Board. After the final week of classes there will be no further opportunities for extra credit or to otherwise improve your grade.

There may be some studies for which you are not eligible (e.g., recruiting based on gender or family structure) or in which you do not wish to take part. Reasonable alternatives are available for those not able or wanting to take part in specific studies, to ensure equitable non-research based opportunities. For each available study in which you would like to complete an alternate assignment, please contact the instructor, who will assign a journal from which to identify and provide an annotated bibliography to the researcher consistent with the description on the Alternate Opportunities page (<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/home/students/alternates>) of the Board. You must complete and submit the research report to the researcher before the date the study closes--late submissions are not accepted. Alternate opportunities will be scaled by the course instructor to ensure commensurate time commitment and course credit with the research-based opportunity.

Tentative Class Schedule: I reserve the right to adjust schedule when necessary

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENT
1	TUE. 8/18	Orientation Ethical Foundations	READINGS: Course Syllabus & eBook Introduction
	TH. 8/20	Foundations & Perspectives (REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #1)	READINGS: eBook Chap. 1 ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
2	TUE. 8/25	News: Truth-telling, & Reporters & Sources	READINGS: eBook Chaps. 2-3 ASSIGNMENTS: DISCUSSION LEADER DATES ASSIGNED
	TH. 8/27	News: Social Justice (REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #2)	READINGS: eBook Chap. 4 ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
3	TUE. 9/1	News: Invasion of Privacy (DISCUSSION LEADER #1)	READINGS: eBook Chap. 5
	TH. 9/3	CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUM MEETING ON NEWS CASE ANALYSES	ASSIGNMENTS: NEWS CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
4	TUE. 9/8	Advertising: Commercialization of Everyday Life (DISCUSSION LEADER #2)	READINGS: eBook Chaps. 6-9
	TH. 9/10	CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUM MEETING ON AD CASE ANALYSES	ASSIGNMENTS: AD CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 3:15 P.M.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENT
5	TUE. 9/15	Public Relations: Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings (DISCUSSION LEADER #3)	READINGS: eBook Chaps. 10-11
	TH. 9/17	CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUM MEETING ON PR CASE ANALYSES	ASSIGNMENTS: PR CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
6	TUE. 9/22	Is Artificial Intelligence Ethical? (DISCUSSION LEADER #4)	READINGS: AI folder on Canvas in Files
	TH. 9/24	Is Artificial Intelligence Ethical? (REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #3)	READINGS: AI folder on Canvas in Files ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
7	TUE. 9/29	Entertainment: Violence, Stereotypes, & Public Trust (DISCUSSION LEADER #5)	READINGS: eBook Chaps. 14-15
	TH. 10/1	Entertainment Media: Censorship & Intellectual Property	READINGS: eBook Chap. 17 and IP folder on Canvas in Files ASSIGNMENTS: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ASSIGNMENT DUE BY 3:15 P.M.
8	TUE. 10/6	Entertainment Media: Reality TV (DISCUSSION LEADER #6)	READINGS: Reality TV folder on Canvas in Files
	TH. 10/8	CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUM MEETING ON PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS	ASSIGNMENTS: PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS DUE BY 3:15 P.M.

COM 367 FALL 2026 – REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS & DUE DATES

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #1 (DUE: AUG. 20): Applying Ethical Principles

- Read the eBook Introduction (pp. 23-75) and complete the following discussion questions with 2-3 paragraphs for each question:
 - How would you define ethics in your own words? How would you define values? How would you define morals? In your opinion, how are all of these terms related
 - What things do you personally value? Why do you value them? Have you always valued them?
 - Review the 5 categories of ethical guidelines (principles) on pp. 36-57. Which of them do you personally find most applicable to your own morals and values? Why?
 - Answers are due via Canvas by 3:15 p.m.

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #2 (DUE: AUG. 27): News: Social Justice

- Read chapter 4 in the eBook and complete the following discussion questions in 2-3 paragraphs for each question:
 - Who decides what counts as news?
 - How do race, gender, and newsroom hierarchies shape whose voices are heard and whose stories are taken seriously?
 - Can news organizations become more representative without reproducing the same hierarchies and exclusions they were created to challenge?
 - And what does truly independent political reporting require in an era of commercial pressure and concentrated media power?
 - Answers are due via Canvas by 3:15 p.m.

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #3 (DUE: SEPT. 24): Can Artificial Intelligence Be Ethical?

- Read the files found in the AI folder in Canva files and complete the following discussion questions in 2-3 pages:
 - How does AI impact your day-to-day life currently? (provide specific examples)
 - How do you see AI impacting your day-to-day life in the future? (provide specific examples)
 - What ethical implications do you think AI has for the media? Please provide 2-3 specific examples and provide the sources for any facts you present for your examples.
 - Answers are due via Canvas by 3:15 p.m.