

Communication 367: Ethical Problems in Mass Communication

Spring 2026 Online, asynchronous

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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 4-5 p.m. or by appointment

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.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

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 completely online over Canvas. (See my welcome letter sent by e-mail and posted under Files on Canvas.) Assignments you must complete are summarized below in the “Assignments” section. Details about each assignment will be shared separately and posted under the Assignments tab on Canvas.

Despite this class being delivered fully online, **to manage the workload for this course, you must “attend” class every day.** That means you actively engage with the material that is available to you online and in the textbook each day. You must also turn in work on time or before any day something is due. You should plan to devote 6-9 hours per week to the course and to check our course Canvas site every day.

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

1. You are expected to 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.
2. You must make a commitment to learning despite this course being online. You need to schedule two hours per week for each credit per course for learning activities.
3. Collaborating with other students enriches your learning activities. The course is designed to encourage and reward collaboration. Feel free to reach out to your fellow students with questions, tips, interesting insights, etc. as it will make our online experience that much more valuable.
4. 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 on Canvas. You may also ask your fellow students for assistance.
5. You are expected to remain civil and polite in all online 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 online or in official communication with other participants. Improper language or tone will not be tolerated and will be penalized by deducting all discussion-participation points for the session.
6. This online method of delivery places responsibility for learning on you, the learner. 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. 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 online discussion forums and individual activities. Late work is accepted, but will be penalized.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE VIA CANVAS BY 5 P.M. ON DUE DATE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. Feedback on all assignments will be provided via Canvas or via email.

Case Analyses: 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 Resources on Canvas.

Entertainment Case Media Literacy Promotional Material & Discussion: You will select a current piece of entertainment media content (e.g., movie, book, streaming series, social media page, music artist, etc.) that you believe has ethical issues and will create a promotional material that describes the media content, why it has ethical issues, and provides at least 3 recommendations for how consumers can most responsibly consume the content. This could be in the form of a poster, short podcast episode, social media post, YouTube video, etc. You will then post your promotional material in our discussion forums on Canvas to share with your classmates toward the end of the semester.

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.

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.

Detailed instructions for assignments will be posted on Canvas

Criteria for evaluation:

50 pts	News Case Analysis
50 pts	Advertising Case Analysis
50 pts	PR Case Analysis
100 pts	Entertainment Case Media Literacy Promotional Material & Discussion
50 pts	Reflection Writing Assignments
100 pts	Personal Code of Ethics
400 pts	Total

GENERAL NOTES ON CLASS POLICIES:

Attendance: While this class is 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.

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 COMunity Belonging Committee 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:** 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.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENT
1	Jan. 12-16	Orientation Ethical Foundations & Perspectives	<p>READINGS: Course Welcome Letter, Syllabus, & eBook Introduction</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: PARTICIPATE IN GETTING TO KNOW YOU DISCUSSION FORUM: CLOSES AT 5 P.M. ON JAN. 16</p>
2	Jan. 19-23	Applying Ethical Principles	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapter 1 & Ethical Principles folder in Canvas Files</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE BY 5 P.M. ON JAN 23</p>
3	Jan. 26-30	News: Truthtelling & Reporters & Sources	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapters 2 & 3 & News folder in Canvas Files</p>
4	Feb. 2-6	News: Social Justice & Invasion of Privacy	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapters 4 & 5 & News folder in Canvas Files</p>
5	Feb. 9-13	News: Embedded Journalism	<p>READINGS: Pros & Cons of Embedded Journalism in News folder in Canvas Files</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: NEWS CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 5 P.M. ON FEB. 13</p>

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENT
6	Feb. 16-20	Political Communication: Fake News, Objectivity & Political Authority	<p>READINGS: Smith and Bennett readings posted in Political Communication folder in Canvas Files</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE BY 5 P.M. ON FEB. 20</p>
7	Feb. 23-27	Advertising: Persuasion & the Commercialization of Everyday Life	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapters 6 & 7 & Advertising folder in Canvas Files</p>
8	March 2-6	Advertising: The Media are Commercial	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapters 8 & 9 & Advertising folder in Canvas Files</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: ADVERTISING CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 5 P.M. ON MARCH 6</p>
9	March 9-13	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
10	March 16-20	Public Relations: Public Communication	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapter 10 & PR folder in Canvas Files</p>
11	March 23-27	Public Relations: Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings	<p>READINGS: eBook Chapter 11 & PR folder in Canvas Files</p> <p>ASSIGNMENTS: PR CASE ANALYSIS DUE BY 5 P.M. ON MARCH 27</p>

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENT
12	March 30-April 3	Is Artificial Intelligence Ethical?	READINGS: AI folder in Canvas Files ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE BY 5 P.M. ON APRIL 3
13	April 6-10	Entertainment: Violence, Profits, & Public Trust	READINGS: eBook chapters 14 & 15 & Entertainment folder in Canvas Files
14	April 13-17	Entertainment: Censorship	READINGS: eBook chapter 17 & Entertainment folder in Canvas Files ASSIGNMENTS: PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS ASSIGNMENT DUE BY 5 P.M. APRIL 17
15	April 20-24	Entertainment: Exploitation & Stereotypes on Reality TV	READINGS: Reality TV folder in Canvas Files ASSIGNMENTS: REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE BY 5 P.M. APRIL 24
16	April 27-May 1	Entertainment Media Literacy Promotion (PARTICIPATE IN MEDIA LITERACY PROMOTION DISCUSSION FORUM: CLOSING AT 5 P.M. ON MAY 1)	ASSIGNMENTS: ENTERTAINMENT CASE MEDIA LITERACY PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL AND DISCUSSION FORUM POST DUE BY 5 P.M. ON MAY 1
17	May 4-8	FINALS WEEK – NO CLASS	NO FINAL EXAM

COM 367 SPRING 2026 – REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS & DUE DATES

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #1: Applying Ethical Principles (DUE: JAN. 23, 5 P.M., CST)

- 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?

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #2: Political Communication (DUE: FEB. 20, 5 P.M., CST)

- Read the Bennett chapter and Taking Sides readings posted under POLITICAL COMMUNICATION folder in Canvas Files
- Based on the reading, answer the following questions in 2-3 pages:
 - How might reporting on political issues and politicians alter journalists' objectivity?
 - What is the difference between fake news and satirical news?
 - Provide some current examples (within the past 3-4 years) of satirical news shows.
 - What ethical concerns are presented by satirical news shows when they cover politics?

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #3: Can Artificial Intelligence Be Ethical? (DUE: APRIL 3, 5 P.M., CST)

- Read the files found in the AI folder in Canvas files.
- Based on the reading, answer the following questions in 2-3 pages:
 - How does artificial intelligence impact your day-to-day life currently?
 - How do you see it impacting your day-to-day life in the future?
 - What ethical implications do you think AI has for the media? Please provide 2-3 specific examples and provide sources for any facts you present to back up your arguments

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT #4: Reflecting on Ethics (DUE: APRIL 24, 5 P.M., CST)

- Based on all that you have learned this semester, please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible in 3-5 pages:

- Why is ethical analysis particularly important in the mass communication field? Please provide 2-3 specific reasons.
- Of all of the topics we covered this semester, which did you find the most interesting? Please provide examples and explain why.
- Identify one person or corporation in your chosen profession who you think acts ethically on a consistent basis. Please provide at least 2 specific reasons why you have chosen them and the source(s) for all of your facts.