##### MERRIMACK COLLEGE

##### COM 5274: Media Ethics

##### Fall 2021

##### Class Meetings: Thursdays from 6:00-10:00pm

##### Professor: Dr. Lisa Perks

##### Office: Cushing 207

##### Office Phone: x3403

##### Office Hours: Tuesdays from 11:30-1:30

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**I. Course Description and Goals**

Throughout this course, students will gain a foundational understanding of ethical principles, guiding ethical codes for media industries, and key laws and court decisions that shape media practices. This class will ideally help students develop their own moral compass and ability to analyze complex issues from a variety of perspectives. The course will be taught largely through analysis of case studies and application of ethical theories to give students practice in making difficult decisions across a variety of situations.

The Communication and Media department focuses on the following graduate student learning outcomes, with this course’s emphasis in bold:

1. **Engage communication history and theory to be an informed and critical producer/consumer.**
2. **Plan and execute targeted oral, written, and mediated message strategies.**
3. Draw from leadership and group communication skills to be an effective member of a team.
4. Demonstrate artistic, technical, and aesthetic skills for visual, audio, and moving media design.
5. **Apply communication and media ethical competencies to decision-making.**

**II. Required Materials**

Christians, Clifford G., Mark Fackler, Kathy Brittain Richardson, Peggy J. Kreshel, and Robert H. Woods. *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning* (10th ed.). New York: Pearson, 2016.

*\*\*A copy of the book is on reserve at the library (for use in the library). Bring your physical book, have a way to access the e-book, or make a scan of the chapters for your use in class the day we will be covering the material.*

**III. Course Policies**

Media Use in the Classroom: Please use laptops and mobile devices only for class-related work.

Late Work: Late papers will be penalized by 10% per each 24 hours that elapses past the deadline. There are no make-ups on missed CPAs or case studies.

Attendance and Lateness: Attendance is closely related to the learning process. Because each class covers a week of work, you have one absence for whatever you need, but will lose 1/2 of a letter grade for absences beyond that. There are no excused absences so use it carefully. If you do miss class, be sure to ask one of your classmates for help getting up to speed.

It disrupts the learning environment when students arrive late or leave early. If you are more than 15 minutes late or must leave more than 15 minutes early, you will be counted absent for that day.

Academic Integrity: Merrimack College has an extensive policy regarding academic integrity. The policy can be found in the Graduate Catalog under [Academic Requirements and Policies](https://catalog.merrimack.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=371). It is your responsibility to be familiar with, and fully abide by, this policy. All work for this class must be your original work. Presenting material from other sources, either print or electronic, as one’s own work constitutes plagiarism. The consequences for violating this policy are serious, and range from failing the assignment, to failing the course, to expulsion from the program. Please consult your professor if you have any questions.

Academic Accommodations from the Accessibility Services Office: Merrimack College provides reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities through the Accessibility Services Office. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact the Accessibility Services Office via the online request form found on the Accessibility Services Office [website](http://www.merrimack.edu/aso), [email](mailto:accessibilityservices@merrimack.edu) or by visiting their office on the third floor of McQuade Library.

Students are encouraged to contact the office as soon as possible to ensure adequate time to meet and create a plan. Students already registered with the Accessibility Services Office are encouraged each semester to request their letters to be emailed, and students are responsible to then email the letter to their instructors personally. While it is understood that some students will not use all accommodations in all courses, accommodations cannot be made retroactively.

Diversity Statement: The commitment of Merrimack College to honor and advance diversity embodies a vigilant, constructive and creative pledge to ensure that all racial, ethnic, cultural and social groups dedicated to discourse and mutual respect are full partners in our common educational quest. The unique experiences and particular perspectives of such partners in the search for knowledge and wisdom contribute to a rich interdisciplinary and multicultural curriculum.

See Merrimack College’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative [here](https://www.merrimack.edu/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/).

See the Department of Communication & Media’s Anti-Racism Statement and Initiatives [here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EqWOqq56NtHooBehPzR-GTR2UEtoMeUBxUWQJsG7Zas/edit).

**IV. Assignments**

Study Guides: Specific questions or topics will be posted in Blackboard for each separate chapter. Students will upload answers to Blackboard before each class that a reading is due. Bring an electronic or paper copy of the assignment to class each day a reading is due so we can discuss them. These activities will help students hone critical reading skills, prepared to engage in class discussions and activities, study for exam, and write well. Update: The study guides are graded with partial credit for completeness. There are 16 chapters or sets of readings that have study guides. Each student’s two lowest grades will be dropped at the end of the semester for a final total of 70 possible points.

Ethical Guidelines Quiz: Because it’s essential for students to understand the ethical guidelines well enough to apply them to different case studies, there will be an ethical guidelines quiz (worth 10 points) on the second day of class. This is exactly what the quiz will look like: *Describe the key points of each of the five overarching principles listed below. When two separate theories are listed under one heading, state the basic points common to both.*

Exam: There will be one cumulative, open note final exam at the end of the semester. The exam will involve short answer and essay questions. Take good notes throughout the semester and use your study guides to support your answers.

Blog Posts: Each student will select two media ethics or law topics and write a 500-600-word blog post covering each topic. The posts should link to sources, define all terms, and engage the audience with polished writing and visuals. *See the assignment guide posted in Blackboard for more information.*

Audio Piece and Run Down: Each student will create a pre-recorded radio episode or pre-recorded podcast for class. The episode/podcast should have a focused theme related to media ethics. These audio pieces can be music-based or involve other types of audio clips, interviews, etc. Run downs are due the week before the audio piece deadline for peer review. *See the assignment guide posted in Blackboard for more information.*

Participation and Professionalism: Students will receive a mid-semester participation and professionalism grade (out of 20 points) and another grade (out of 20 points) at the end of the semester. Feel free to speak with Dr. Perks at any time to discuss how to improve participation and professionalism.

Case Study Presentation and Discussion Facilitation: Once during the semester, each student will present a media ethics case study and guide discussion on that case study to enhance the scope of our class. This case study could be (but does not have to be) the subject of one of your blog posts and/or your audio piece. *See the assignment guide in Blackboard for more details.*

**V. Grades**

Final Exam 60 points

Audio Piece and Run Down 120 points

Study Guide Questions 65 points

Ethical Guidelines Quiz 10 points

Participation and Professionalism: 40 points

Blog posts (2) 80 points

Case Study Present/Discuss 25 points

*Total 400 points*

*Credit Hour Justification:*

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| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Time Spent** |
| Class Time | 200 minutes/week x 15 weeks = 50 hours |
| Readings and Study Guides | 5 hours/week x 15 weeks = 75 hours |
| Audio Piece and Run Down | 25 hours |
| Blog Posts (2) | 20 hours |
| Exam Studying | 10 hours |
| Case Study Preparation | 2 hours |
| **Total: 182 hours** | |

**VI. Final Grades**

You can calculate your final grade by adding up the points you earned for each assignment and dividing by the total points possible.

Here is the graduate course grading scale:

A (90% and above): “A” indicates outstanding work  
B (82% to 89.99%): “B” means that the work is satisfactory  
C (72% to 81.99%): “C” (2.0) is deemed unsatisfactory at the graduate level.

*Grading Policies from the Graduate Student Handbook:* No more than two courses at the C level (2.0 or higher) will be counted as acceptable toward a graduate degree. Students may be permitted to repeat only two courses and may repeat each course only one time. Those who receive more than two C level grades will be automatically dismissed from their program of study. “See Repeat Policy” to understand how to repeat a course.

Any grade lower than a C- will not be acceptable for graduate-level work and cannot be counted as credit towards the degree. However, the grade will be counted toward the graduate student’s GPA. If a student receives a grade lower than a C in a required course, the student will be required to retake the course. A course may only be retaken one time. The most recent grade will replace the first grade and will be factored into the student’s GPA.

MEDIA ETHICS COURSE SCHEDULE

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| **Date** | **Class Topic** | **Assignment Due This Day** |
| 9/2 | Read start of chapter 1 in class; Sign up for case study; Intro to Ethical Guidelines |  |
| 9/9 | Finish Intro; Intro to Advertising and the Commercialization of Everyday Life; Blogging + Blogging Ethics; Review Blogging Assignment | **Ethical Guidelines Quiz (No Notes);** Read chapter 6 *and* section introduction (pages 149-154). In “Supplemental Reading/Resources” folder, read “Slate Blogging Advice” and Toledano and Avidar’s “PR, Social Media and Ethics” article. Study guide due. |
| 9/16 | Discuss Advertising in an Image-Based Media Culture and The Media are Commercial | Chapters 7 and 8. Study guide due. |
| 9/23 | Advertising’s Professional Culture and Advertising Law | Chapter 9 and “Advertising Law” supplemental readings in Blackboard. Study guide due. |
| 9/30 | Public Communication; Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings | Chapters 10 and 11 *and* section introduction (pages 251-253). Study guide due. |
| 10/7 | Conflicting Loyalties; Demands of Social Responsibility | Chapters 12 and 13. Study guide due. |
| 10/14 | Discuss blog posts; Discuss Institutional Pressures | **Blog Post 1 Due**; Chapter 1. Study guide due. |
| 10/21 | Truthtelling; Reporters and Sources | Chapters 2 and 3. Study guide due. |
| 10/28 | Social Justice; Peer review audio run downs | Chapter 4; Study guide due. **Audio Run Downs Due** |
| 11/4 | Listen to Audio Pieces; First Amendment Freedom of the Press (to read in class) | **Audio Pieces Due** |
| 11/11 | No Class: Veteran’s Day |  |
| 11/18 | Privacy Torts (Dr. Perks might attend NCA) | Supplemental privacy readings; Study guide due. |
| 11/25 | No Class: Thanksgiving |  |
| 12/2 | Privacy; Discuss Blog Posts | Chapter 5; **Blog Post 2 Due** |
| 12/9 | Entertainment chapter; *All the President’s Men* | Entertainment Chapter (student choice); Study guide due; Bring in questions about exam materials |
| 12/16 | Final Exam During Class Time |  |