



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Media Ethics Spring Semester 2009

## 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.

## Abstract

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

[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**

**Rights**

Use of Materials on the OEC

**Resource Type**

Instructor Materials

**Parent Collection**

Syllabi

**Topics**

Confidentiality

Conflict of Interest

Research and Practice

**Discipline(s)**

Communications

Social and Behavioral Sciences