COM 384
Ethics in Communication
TR – Spring 2007

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Course Description:
Any communication encounter is marked by a concern for ethics. Anytime we communicate, whether to inform, to persuade, or to entertain, we impose and promote our view of the world. This course examines the ethical implications of communication by drawing on established ethical theory, communication research, and everyday experience. The scope of the course includes, but is not limited to, public speaking, political communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, advertising, persuasion, social movements, feminist/multicultural approaches to communication, entertainment, and the Internet.

Course Goals:
- To encourage students to engage and examine the ethical issues inherent in communication.
- To encourage students to critically examine their own ethical responsibilities as senders and receivers of communication.
- To develop in students an appreciation of the ways in which ethical choices impact the delivery and reception of communication.
- To provide an opportunity for students to extend their critical thinking, speaking, writing, and research skills.
- To encourage students to make well reasoned arguments about ethical issues in communication.

Required Texts:


Postman, N. *Amusing Ourselves to Death.*

Weisenthal, S. *The Sunflower.*

Additional readings will be made available via Web-CT. These readings are not optional and must be read as assigned. You are welcome to read online or print (please be responsible about printing at the library).
Recommended Text: *American Psychological Association Style Manual, 5th Edition*. Please note, APA style is NOT a suggestion in this class. If you are unfamiliar with this style, you should buy the manual. Choosing to avoid APA (or simply making it up as you go along) will result in 2 letter grades deducted from your project.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Any discussion of ethics breeds different opinions. I fully expect lively debate on the issues we will be covering. All students should form and state their opinions respectfully with regard to us all. All opinions (even ones we don’t agree with) deserve equal air time. I will do my best to facilitate engaging and balanced discussions in this class. I ask the same of you.

**IMPORTANT NOTE #2:** This class covers a wide range of topics, from the mundane to the inflammatory and controversial. If we are discussing/viewing something that I feel is potentially controversial or offensive, I will give students as much warning as possible. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you have about class material.

**IMPORTANT NOTE #3:** I have high expectations for any student. However, I have particularly high expectations for advanced students in the Department of Communication. Your college classes are your job at this point in your life. You are expected to be in class and participate actively. You are expected to meet deadlines and turn in assignments when they are due. Please know that I will not extend accommodations to any individual that I cannot extend to the rest of the class. In order to treat all students fairly, I cannot, in good conscience, extend deadlines or take late work in the event of “special” individual circumstances.

Criteria for evaluation.

- A = 92-100
- A- = 90-91.99
- B+ = 88-89.99
- B = 82-87.99
- B- = 80-81.99
- C+ = 78-79.99
- C = 72-77.99
- C- = 70-71.99
- D+ = 68-69.99
- D = 62-67.99
- F = <62

Assignments:

Participation (5%) See attendance policy. Participation is made up of your in-class performance, as well as occasional take-home and in-class assignments. There will also be occasional pop quizzes over the course of the semester.
Mid-term Exam (20%)  

Final Exam (20%)  

Exams will be some combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay.

Proposition Paper (20%)  This paper will require you to state a proposition regarding some ethical issue in communication. Your paper will be structured around a central argument of your choosing. Your topic should be COMMUNICATION based. For example, while “animal rights” is an ethical issue, in and of itself, it is not a communication based issue. However, PETA’s use of propagandistic appeals in support of animal rights on their website would be. Your proposition should be supported by well reasoned, well researched arguments. Your arguments must draw on established scholarly literature in ethics and communication. Your paper MUST include 5 scholarly sources of information. Your research should come from the College library or one of the College owned databases. Internet sources are not acceptable forms of research and will not be counted toward the research requirement (the Internet can, of course, be used as the basis of your proposition). Papers should be 5-6 pages in length.

Group Presentation (35%)  This project requires you to work as a group to give a substantive presentation on an issue or instance in communication that your group feels has important ethical consequences. Your group may choose to take a balanced approach to the issue (giving pros and cons) or you may choose to focus on one side of the issue. Your group will draw connections between the issue and the theories we have used in class. Your presentation will be evaluated on the basis of cohesiveness, quality, structure, and creativity. Essentially, you will be teaching the class about this communication issue or instance and the ethical implications therein. The presentation should be as interactive as possible, utilizing whatever teaching tools (Power Point, video, audio, activities, etc.) that the group feels will accomplish your goals. Your presentation should be backed by SUBSTANTIVE RESEARCH. Each group will provide copies of all research used (e.g. articles, book chapters, etc.). Your information should come from SCHOLARLY, ACADEMIC sources NOT from random websites. I would never expect an academic paper to utilize Wikipedia or philosophy.com as sources. I do not expect to see them in your presentations. While some material online is useful, it should be checked to ensure that it is documented properly. In addition, many of the topics you will work on have substantial scholarly literature to aid your presentation. You are expected to use that literature and not take the easy way out. For example, the issue of presentations of body image in the media is extensively covered in the literature. Therefore, I do not expect that your presentation will draw from www.bodyimageinmedia.com. You are encouraged to work on this project closely throughout the semester. I expect all groups to generate a group contract of expectations. Each member should sign the contract. If problems arise, this contract should be used to govern and enforce group behavior. Presentations should be about 30 minutes in length (your presentation will be stopped at 30 minutes – no exceptions). Each group will provide
a) a powerpoint presentation given to me ONE WEEK before your presentation. **Each slide should be footnoted appropriately to include the SOURCES of all information.**

b) a reference binder which contains a bibliography in APA style as well as copies of any and all support materials used in the project

c) a complete speaking outline of your presentation

d) stapled/bound copies of all handouts for grading purposes.

**Due dates will be assigned randomly once groups are formed.**

**Note on group work:** I understand that many classes in the Department of Communication require group work. I also understand that group work can be trying at times. We will discuss this at length in class, however, keep in mind that your presentation will be graded as a group. This means that you will have to work together to achieve the grade you desire. I will, of course, provide feedback and help if needed, however, I will not play any of the following roles in your group: scheduler, author, referee, mediator, den mother, crossing guard, nurse, Hamlet, or anything else that you should be doing on your own. Part of preparing for professional careers in communication involves being able to work with others effectively.

**Divorce clause:** If a group member decides to behave badly, you do have the option of divorcing that individual from your group. We will discuss this at length as the semester progresses. However, your group is well within their rights to remove an unproductive group member. I strongly recommend that all groups create and abide by a “Group Contract” meant to govern group behavior as well as provide the justification if the Divorce Clause needs to be invoked. **Out of fairness to group members you may not divorce a group member less than one week from your presentation date. This means that your group has to be together enough early in the semester to know if a group member is not pulling her/his weight.**

Non-group option (35%). Some individuals will know early in the semester that group work will not be possible for them (work schedules, commute, etc.). If this is the case, you should contact me early in the semester. This is not an easy assignment and should not be undertaken lightly. It may also be an option for individuals divorced from their groups, but I am unconvinced that someone who starts this at the last possible second would be able to complete it successfully. This assignment will involve the creation of a teaching unit on some topic related to communication and ethics NOT covered in class. Your unit can address a theoretical school or a general topic to which you connect theory. The teaching unit should be compiled in a binder and will be comprised of lecture material, exercises, video clips, class readings, an annotated reference list in APA style, at least one power point presentation (paper and on CD) to be used in conjuncture with the lecture you created, and any handouts your would provide. You cannot simply choose to do this option. Your project MUST be approved by me at the BEGINNING of the semester (i.e. you cannot simply choose that your group is bugging you and you want to work on your own mid-way through the semester). You should contact me before groups are decided on if you are interested in this option.
Attendance: Your regular attendance and participation are expected and encouraged in this class. Please keep in mind that for me, participation is more than being a body in a desk. You are expected to ACTIVELY participate in class discussion and activities. You are permitted two absences for whatever reason should arise. I do not need to know why you are not in class. After those two absences, I will deduct 5 points from your final attendance/participation grade. I take attendance at the beginning of every class. If you come late, you are responsible for checking in. You are well aware of when class meets. Please avoid making flight arrangements, appointments, etc during class time. A note on lateness: I know that things happen. Alarm clocks don’t go off. Cars don’t start. Printers get cranky. Parking gets messy. A late arrival for a good reason is not a problem. Habitual lateness is a problem. Avoid it at all costs.

Cell phones (and other things that beep, whistle, vibrate, hum, or otherwise make noise in class). Technology is a wonderful thing. We are going to spend a good deal of time in this class talking about how it has changed our lives. However, the classroom is not a place to take calls. Please turn off all cell phones and beepers and NEVER (if you happen to forget) answer your cell phone in class.

Exams must be taken on the day scheduled. If you are more than 10 minutes late for an exam you will be unable to take it and will receive a grade of F = 0. All cell phones must be turned off and stowed during exams.

Academic Honesty: In addition to the high quality I expect of your work, I fully expect that your work be your own. I, and the Department of Communication take issues of academic honesty very seriously. Plagiarism, cheating, copying, or in any way submitting work that is not solely your own will result in a grade of F and will be referred to the College Honors Board. Even unintentional plagiarism will be prosecuted. By virtue of my contract I am obliged to bring forward any instance of academic dishonesty to the campus honor board. Similarly, you, as students, are bound by the College honor code to report instances of academic dishonesty amongst your peers. If you are in any way unclear about definitions of plagiarism, academic honesty, etc., refer to the College policy stated in your student handbook or ask me directly.

Disability Accommodations: Accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. Such accommodations should be arranged for at the beginning of the semester with accompanying paperwork provided from the SNAP office. Students with special needs are invited to meet with me to discuss their expectations of and progress in the class. Requests for taking exams in the SNAP offices must be made AT LEAST one week prior to the exam. Late requests may not be accommodated.

Written Assignments: Written assignments will be graded on both form and content. You will be given detailed assignment sheets with specific requirements, however, all formal written assignments should be typed, doubled-spaced, with one inch margins around, and a font size no larger than 12 point. Your paper should use proper APA (American Psychological Association), 5th Edition documentation style both parenthetically and in your references. Assignments are due at the beginning of class.
You must turn in a hard copy. No emailed assignments or assignments in my box or under my door will be accepted. No late assignments are accepted without the combination of extraordinary circumstances and documentation from the College. I reserve the right to independently verify any excuse provided to me.

Meetings: My office hours and contact information are listed on the first page of this syllabus. I strongly encourage you to meet with me at my office if you have questions, comments, and/or concerns about the class or your performance in it. Email is always a good way to reach me as well. It is checked regularly, almost every day. I check my voicemail with less frequency on weekends and days when I am not in the office.

A day by day class schedule is posted separately on WEB-CT.