

**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO**  
**ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION 215-202**  
**Fall SEMESTER 2017**  
**Corboy Law Center rm 901 Tu-Thur 2:30-3:45 p.m.**

**Instructor:** Randy Minkoff, [rminkoff@luc.edu](mailto:rminkoff@luc.edu)

**Form of communication:** Email is preferred and checked regularly

**Course overview:** All professions, particularly in the field of communications, face ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Controversy itself is nothing new; humankind has been grappling with right and wrong since the beginning of time. But the methods in which the information is imparted are not always clear cut. Today's decision makers and communicators face continuous challenges on how to gather the facts, how to determine the legitimacy of sources, and how to produce and write the stories, while making certain they are adhering to their companies' own internal rules and regulations. Sometimes reporters themselves become the story—for better or worse—and must address the ensuing consequences. Companies and organizations face the challenge of protecting themselves in crises and communicating in an honest manner, both internally and externally. Performers and entertainers face the challenge of being ostracized or possible censorship. The legitimacy of social media continues to have a major impact and has posed even more challenges. We will investigate the growing problem of “fake news” and its impact on both journalism and the public. The bottom line in today's world: Public vs. private no longer exists and everything is on the record.

**Course specifics:** We will examine major issues from the past and present and determine what can be learned from how they were handled (or in many cases mishandled.) You are strongly encouraged to be aware of contemporary events, bring examples to class, and actively participate in all discussions. In addition, there will be relevant videos and appropriate case studies. There will be several written assignments that I will go over in detail during the semester that will take several different forms. There will also be group presentations and final paper, which will be combined as your final exam.

**Important FYI:** While we will cover all of the topics on the schedule, there will be always be news, and events on any given day may take precedence. When that happens, we will take the time for discussion and may postpone the topic at hand. This will be somewhat free-flowing in nature, keeping in mind that we are talking about the news of the day and the opportunities for instant analysis in ‘real world real time’ scenarios.

**Special note:** *You are required to purchase a copy of the latest AP Stylebook so that required assignments are in the proper form. It is imperative you have access to keep track of daily newspapers, blogs, news websites as well as radio and television newscasts.*

**Attendance:** If you absolutely cannot attend class, you must let me know *immediately*. Not during or after a class – but before. Because class discussions are a vital part of the course, I will regularly assess class participation as part of your grade. I will make sure ahead of time that you are made aware of the assignments and when they are due. You must turn in ALL assignments on time, even if you are unable to attend class for a specific reason. All assignments, power points and videos will only be presented in class so it is imperative you attend. If you have an excused absence, it is your responsibility to obtain all material covered from a classmate as it will be in ‘real time’ and not posted on line.

**Grades:** For most assignments you will receive a letter grade: A (excellent), B (very good), C (average), D (poor), F (automatic for any incomplete assignment.) Your overall grade is based on many factors: attendance, active participation in discussions, creativity and thoughtfulness on all written assignments. I place a very high level on in-class participation and weigh heavily toward that in determining a final grade.

In some isolated cases you will receive a ‘complete’ for an assignment; I will be very clear up front about grade expectations during each project. You will receive each grade in a timely fashion. The combined final exam will be more heavily weighted.

**Additionally:**

--Be on time. Lateness will not be tolerated. Be respectful of your professor and your classmates.

--Complete all assignments on time. No exceptions. If assignments are to be e-mailed, they MUST be by the time prescribed. Other assignments MUST be turned in at the start of class.

--Be original. Be ethical (remember the title of the class!), be honest with me and in your work. Always. Plagiarism is a serious offense and there will be consequences.

--Don't ever hesitate to ask for clarification or direction *before*– not *after* – the assignment is due...

--Be aware of what's going on in the world and be prepared to participate in all discussions.

--You will have opportunities to meet privately with me before and after class on posted days to discuss your work, grades, assignments and other issues relating to ethics.

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)**

### **Week of Aug. 29-31st Introduction & overview: Modern day ethics in the United States**

- Why “Codes of Ethics” exist. How ethics have evolved – and in some cases, not evolved – through American history.
- The First Amendment and “Truthiness”
- Scanning the current ethical issues facing advertising, magazines, print and electronic media as well as the business and political communities.
- Contemporary stories & discussion (ongoing weekly)

### **Week of Sept. 5-7: The presidency/future of Trump administration**

- The Russian investigation; healthcare, immigration; is the Administration trying to circumvent ethics in by freezing out the media or does the public want a change in how government is covered?
- Will the rift between the Trump Administration and media lead to more ‘questionable’ acts?
- How much does traditional media still matter in the age of social media (including its use by the administration?)

### **Week of Sept. 12-14: Examining issues in advertising/public relations yesterday – and today.**

- How companies have faced ethical issues stemming from not evaluating the consumer; how companies mishandled crisis or tried to sidestep issues through false statements
- Crisis communications. How big and small firms have had to deal with public missteps.
- What is permissible today would have not been allowed in previous generations.  
When do ads and ad campaigns cross ethical barriers?
- Regulation: Should there be more, or is it up to the public to decide real vs. ‘fake’?

### **Week of Sept. 19-21: T: Privacy-when does it go over the line?**

- Companies that scan your email and texts. The “google” controversy.
- Is it ethical for companies, the government, or your families to be able to read or approve social media posts? Is the trend for states to ban companies that review your posts a good or bad thing?

**Week of Sept. 26-28<sup>th</sup> The rise of fake news, its effect on social and traditional media.**

--Is it a temporary problem or one that will continue to grow?

--Does the public believe when it sees on the internet and the future of “old” media such as magazines, essays, network news and newspapers?

--Is social media a helpful tool or an ethical challenge to those who rely on it as their sole source of information? harmful or are is the public over-reacting?

**Week of Sept. 26-28 Do we believe what we see? Entertainment vs actual competition**

--From the \$64,000 Question to “The Voice” and “Dancing with the Stars.”

--Screening of the PBS documentary on the Quiz Show scandals

--Does the mainstream media pay too much attention to what happens in entertainment at the expense of “real news?”

Oct. 3-5<sup>th</sup>--MIDTERMS

**Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> break Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> –Review of midterms, outlook for rest of the semester.**

**Oct 13 Center for Digital Ethics & Policy Symposium.**

--You will choose a topic seminar at the Loyola conference and review it for the rest of the class.

**Oct 17--Plagiarism. Is it more of a problem in a digital age? A historical look back at how it has influenced politics and communications...**

--The legacy of Ben Bradlee and The Washington Post

--Stephen Glass of Shattered Glass, others who have fabricated information and stories. Was it an overreaction or a breath of ethical behavior?

--The pressure to get information out too quickly at the sacrifice of accuracy & ethics.

--Examining past election campaigns from the Founding Fathers to today. Was ethical behavior worse today than 250 years ago?

**Week of Oct. 24-26<sup>th</sup>: Watergate is *The Watershed* and how it is influenced communications over the past four decades.**

--“All the President’s Men” viewing and in-class quiz

### **Week of Oct. 31-Nov. 2: Entertainment celebrities--Blurred Lines**

--The use in television, books and movies of real-life people in public professions in fictional entertainment.

--Crossing the line, what is acceptable to the public and the professions itself? Does it impact the public's view of high profile people and compromise their integrity.

### **Week of Nov. 7-9: Sports and big money--ethical problems through the years.**

--Should reporters ever be 'fans'?

--Screening of the documentary "Sidd Finch" and how a major magazine deliberately put a hoax to stimulate circulations.

Public relations vs actual reporting.

--Athletes bypassing the media to reach the public

### **Week of Nov. 14-16<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Censorship/regulatory issues.**

--Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Provisions. Why they were enacted and later challenged. Is government regulation still needed in the world of the internet?

--Is it fair to regulate over-the-air television but not cable/streaming services?

-The power of the FCC & censorship from Vaudeville to George Carlin to Howard Stern

### **Week of Nov. 21-23<sup>rd</sup>==THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS ON TUESDAY AND THURSDAY.**

### **Week of Nov. 28-30<sup>th</sup>: "Off the record", leaks**

--Is everything 'on the record in the digital age?

--Is WikiLeaks the wave of the future or does it cross the line?

--Is the government compromised when people leak sensitive information to the public?

### **Week of Dec. 5-12 Final exams, meetings**

Two part final exam, last chance to meet to discuss grades.