MEDIA ETHICS: Fall 2025
MRTS 4455

Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor: Dr. Marjorie Lewis
marjorie.lewis@unt.edu
Office hours: Online by appointment

Required textbook:
Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning, **12th ed**, *Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel, Woods, Jr.*

Additional required readings: Articles posted to Canvas

Syllabus Change Policy
Changes to the syllabus will be stated in "Announcements."

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Examines ethical questions and dilemmas faced by journalists and other media practitioners, with a strong emphasis on how to implement and use an effective ethical decision-making process in the newsroom. Includes extensive use of case studies, class discussions, research and writing.

COURSE GOALS

This course is designed to help you apply ethical principles to situations you will encounter as professional communicators and as media consumers through a critical process of reflection and deliberation. You will explore on-the-job problems and moral dilemmas in journalism, advertising, public relations, entertainment, and between persons --working toward ethically justifiable and responsible solutions.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As a result of this course, students will:

1. Learn to recognize ethical issues present in professional situations;

2. Develop analytical skills through application of decision-making techniques;

3. Learn to tolerate disagreement as to "correct" procedures and techniques;

4. Investigate process of moral development and reasoning;

5. Seek to understand the impact of media decisions on society;

6. Derive more complete understanding of various philosophical orientations to ethics;

7. Develop an understanding of key ethical issues facing the news industry, as well as advertising, public relations and entertainment media professionals;

8. Formulate strategies and guidelines for confronting ethical challenges in news, advertising, public relations and entertainment media.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Use of AI

If generative AI tools are used ethically, they can be powerful tools; therefore, I am allowing ethical use of AI in this course for the following activities:

1. Brainstorming and refining your ideas;
2. Finding information on your topic;
3. Drafting an outline to organize your thoughts; and
4. Checking grammar and style.

**********If you use any AI tool for the permitted purposes, you must include a statement of its use on any submitted assignments. By doing so, you'll reinforce its ethical use, and I will gain insights into how AI helps students on assignments. Including this statement on your submitted work will not change your grade in any way.********

The use of generative AI tools is **not permitted** in this course for the following activities:

1. Using the tool to compose discussion board prompts assigned to you or content that you put into a Zoom chat and submit as your original work.
2. Writing a writing assignment.
3. Writing sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments.

You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty. Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways will receive a zero (0). Further, I reserve the right to discuss any AI violation with university administration regarding university policy violations. When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS/GRADE BREAKDOWN

The course has three components: Discussions, Case Studies, Tests

DISCUSSIONS

Because this is an online class, we will engage with each other through the Canvas discussion board. I will post one question for discussion per week – unless otherwise noted. You must **create one thread** in response to my question and then respond to **two other threads** for a total of **three posts** within each discussion question. This is a great opportunity to engage and challenge each other on big issues. But always be respectful. Disagreeing with explanation is great; we can learn from new and different perspectives. Respectful interaction is required**. If you do not complete (3) the discussion but participate with fewer than three posts per discussion question, you will receive a zero (0).** This is a discussion board, and maximum interaction is essential. All must be submitted by deadline to receive credit. Missed deadlines will equal zero (0) points. **Each created thread and each response must be fully developed to receive credit. One or two lines with "I agree. Way to go," will not meet this requirement. I do not grade on content but rather on substance, so be honest in all discussions. Get the most out of this.**

CASE STUDIES

You will be expected to read the assigned chapter(s). Within each chapter you'll find several case studies. I will select the case(s) and post questions. You will be expected to answer each of the questions I post to Canvas – **a minimum of 200 words** responses but can longer if you prefer. The response must be a concise demonstration of your understanding of the case. **While the discussions are conversational, the case studies are academic writings that reflect the material, so please use the material within each case as support in each case study assignment. Case Studies are not opinions unless specifically asked, in which case the opinion must be defended in the response by referring to the case assigned that week. Case Study responses must also include references to quadrants of the Potter Box. Missed deadlines will equal zero (0) points.**

TESTS

TESTS #1, #2 and #3 will have 30 questions each, and each test will be worth 150 points. The three tests will have a multiple choice/true-false format. The first test will focus on the Potter Box formula for ethical evaluations. The second and third tests will focus on applying the Potter Box formula in the evaluation process. Essentially: **Test #1)** what you need to know. **Test #2)** and **Test #3)** how 'what you need to know' has been applied in the case studies I have assigned. The tests will be timed and open book. Please do not share questions and answers with anyone or post test questions and answers to

online sites. I do have methods of tracing, but because I may not know who may have committed the breach, the entire class will suffer as a result of a breach unless the individual who commits the breach steps forward. Please don't put any of us on that path. Thank you! All must be submitted by deadline to receive credit. **Missed deadlines will equal zero (0) points.**

The Introduction: Potter Box Format

This is the method used to determine final ethical decisions. All boxes must be aligned to reach a final ethical decision.

Q1: Definition: Explanation (refer to the textbook on crafting a definition) of the Media Ethics issue. Description of the issue – the ethical dilemma.	**Q4: Loyalties:** My loyalties are: (list as apply to Q1) Duty to_____ Duty to_____ Duty to_____ (Society? Colleagues? The public? And so forth)
Q2: Values: Refer to The Introduction section on values for hints My values are: (list as apply to Q1))	**Q3: Guiding Principles: Include the philosopher(s) (Kant or Mill or Rawls or Aristotle or Judeo-Christian… and the philosophy each philosopher presents.)** The philosophers and their principles that will guide me in making my decision are: (list as apply to Q1)

Completing the Potter Box leads to the final ethical decision.

CLASS POLICIES

LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. DOCUMENTATION OF ILLNESS

IS THE ONLY EXCEPTION.

Canvas links disappear on the due date and time (when the clock strikes 11:59 p.m.). Only work submitted through Canvas will be graded and included in your final grade.

POINTS DISTRIBUTION

12 Case Studies	= 240 points (20/each)
14 Class Discussions	= 308 points (22/each)
Three Tests	= 450 points (150/each)
Syllabus Quiz	= 2 points

Total	= 1000 points

A = 900-1000 pts. B = 899-800 pts. C = 799-700 pts. D = 699-600 pts.
F = 599 pts. and below

Complete the readings before engaging in discussion board conversations.

Grading
Total Points Possible for Semester = 1,000

900-1000 = A
800-899 = B
700-799 = C
600-699 = D
599-0 = F

Below you'll see the readings assigned for each week. It will include the chapter and the case numbers. All due dates for each week will be reflected on Canvas within each weekly module.

NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED

Module 1:

Reading: The Introduction: Pages 1-35

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, August 24 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Discussion (3 posts required)

> Syllabus Quiz

Module 2:

Reading: Continue to study The Introduction pp. 1-35

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, August 31 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Discussion (3 posts required)

> Test #1 (Potter Box Method of Analysis: The Introduction, pages 1-35)

Module 3:

Reading: Part 1 News pp. 43-45; Ch. 1: Institutional Pressures pp. 47-49; Case 5 "Journalism in the Age of ChatGPT" pp. 67-71

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, September 7 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #5

> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 4:

Reading: Ch. 2: Truthtelling pp. 76-77; Case 6 "Science Journalism During the Covid-19 Pandemic" pp. 77-81

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, September 14 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #6

> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 5:

Reading: Ch. 3: Reporters and Sources pp. 106-107; Case 12 "Stolen Voice Mail" pp. 112-114

Activity/Due Date: **<u>Sunday, September 21 at 11:59 p.m.</u>**

> One Case Study #12
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 6:

Reading: Ch. 4: Social Justice pp. 128-129; Case 17 "A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains" pp. 133-139; The Heart of the Matter in News Ethics pp. 177-178

Activity/Due Date: **<u>Sunday, September 28 at 11:59 p.m.</u>**

> One Case Study #17
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 7:

Reading: Part 2 Persuasion in Advertising pp. 179-185; Ch. 7: Advertising in an Image-Based Culture pp. 213-215; Case 28 "Bold Glamour Filter" pp. 215-220

Activity/Due Date: **<u>Sunday, October 5 at 11:59 p.m.</u>**

> One Case Study #28
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 8:

Reading: Ch. 8: The Media Are Commercial pp. 243-246; Case 36 "Virtual Product Placement" pp. 266-269; The Heart of the Matter in Advertising Ethics pp. 309-311

Activity/Due Date: **<u>Sunday, October 12 at 11:59 p.m.</u>**

> One Case Study #36
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)
>
> Test #2 (Cases #5, #6, #12, #17, #28, #36)

Module 9:

Reading: Part 3 Persuasion and Public Relations pp. 313-315; Ch. 10: Public Communication pp. 317-318; Case 43 "First Ladies Cause Campaign" pp. 324-325

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, October 19 at 11: 59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #43
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 10:

Reading: Ch. 11 Telling the Truth in Organizational Settings pp. 336-337; Case 50 "Tweeting Roils the Market" pp. 349-353

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, October 26 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #50
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 11:

Reading: Ch. 12: Conflicting Loyalties pp. 357-358; Case 55 "Playing for Pay" pp. 370-371; Heart of the Matter in Public Relations Ethics pp. 394-395

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, November 2 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #55
>
> One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 12:

Reading: Part 4 Entertainment pp. 397-401; Ch. 15: Profits, Wealth, and Public Trust pp. 421-422; Case 72 "Faux Doc, Twice Baked" pp. 434-436

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, November 9 at 11:59 p.m.**

> One Case Study #72
>
> One Discussion (3 posts required)

Module 13:

Reading: Ch. 16: Media Scope and Depth pp. 442-443; Case 76 "Tragedy Lite" pp. 450-453

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, November 16 at 11:59 p.m.**

        One Case Study #76

        One Discussion (3 posts required)

Module 14:

Reading: Ch. 17: Censorship pp. 461-463; Case 81 "A Few Sweet Men" pp. 468-470; The Heart of the Matter in Entertainment Ethics pp. 475-476

Activity/Due Date: **Sunday, November 23 11:59 p.m.**

        One Case Study #81

        One Discussion Board (3 posts required)

Module 15:

Thanksgiving Break: Nothing due

Module 16: Last due date of the semester: **Thursday, December 4 (December 5 is Reading Day)**

Activity/Due Date: **Thursday, December 4 at 11:59 p.m.**

        Test #3 (Cases #43, #50, #55, #72, #76, #81)

DUE DATE REMINDER: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED

Final Exam Week – There is no final exam in this course. Test #3 is your final assignment.

Academic Honesty Policy

Please refer to the UNT Faculty Handbook or your department regarding the Academic Policy.

"You are encouraged to become familiar with the University's Policy of Academic dishonesty found in the *Student Handbook*. The content of the Handbook applies to this course. Additionally, the following specific requirements will be expected in this class: (enter specific requirements). If you are in doubt regarding the requirements, please consult with me before you complete any requirements of the course."

ODA Notification: *The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.* As a faculty member, I will provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities. Students (you) must inform faculty (me) of their need for accommodation by providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations are at http://www.unt.edu/oda/apply/index.html. Visit the Office of Disability Accommodation in the University Union (room 321) or call 940.565.4323. Be sure and present any ODA documentation to me by the third week of class.