

**Media Law and Regulations,
MRTS 4320:001 - FALL 2026,
5:30 p.m. – 8:20 p.m., Monday, RTFP 264**

Adjunct Professor, Rick Walker, JD

Office hours: By appointment

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REQUIREDTEXT:

The following textbook is not required, but highly recommended. It will be used for the course. You may purchase a copy at the bookstore or online. A copy of the text should be on 2 hour reserve at Willis Library.

Electronic Media Law, by Roger L. Sadler (Sage, 2005; ISBN 1-4129-0588-5).

Please read the information and policies in this syllabus carefully and keep it for further reference.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed both for those who plan a career in the American media industries and for those who wish an overview of the history and practice of major aspects of U.S. law and policy as they affect the radio, television, and film industries.

Throughout the course, a number of questions will be raised: What is the historical, philosophical, and legal basis for the regulation of the electronic media in the United States? What is the relationship between constraints on the media and rights guaranteed under the First Amendment? What regulatory issues do the Internet, satellite radio, AI, and other new technologies raise? Why does media law and policy exist in America in the form it does? How might it be different in the future? Whose interests are served by it? What is its impact on American society?

For those who plan a career in the media industries, a basic understanding of media law and regulation is essential. We'll review

some basics of the American legal system with special emphasis on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We'll cover practical law basics in such areas as defamation, privacy, copyright, obscenity, advertising, broadcasting, and social media. We'll also take a look at the major government players involved in passing and enforcing media law: Congress, the Courts, the Federal Communication Commission and the Federal Trade Commission.

One important aspect of American law is that it is ever-changing. Laws in place one day may vanish the next due to court decisions or other government action. Students must therefore go beyond a rote memorization of legal facts to an understanding of the philosophy and practice of American media law. Consequently, this course will emphasize the historical and conceptual aspects of the field and provide a close examination of ongoing trends.

A list of the specific topics to be covered along with reading assignments can be found in the course calendar.

Additional handouts & readings may be provided on the course website as PDFs. You should download and print out copies as needed. Paper copies of these readings will not be handed out in class but this material may be covered on exams.

TEACHING ASSISTANT:

A graduate teaching assistant (TA), may help out with classroom tasks, AV prep, attendance, returning exams, and other various tasks.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students are expected to attend classes regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for each class. If you are experiencing any **[symptoms of COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html)** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or **askSHWC@unt.edu**) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or **COVID@unt.edu** for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test

results, or potential exposure.

Attendance is required at every class. **Note: Some class sessions will be held LIVE online via zoom.** Your attendance for the online classes will be required.

The University of North Texas policy on attendance and excused absences is outlined in the current University Catalog. If you must be absent due to an approved university activity, please furnish me with the appropriate written permission before your absence (see the University catalog for details on this policy). Absences due to illness, doctor's appointments, family deaths and other such emergencies will be considered excused provided you inform me of the reason for your absence upon returning to class.

Any unexcused absence may result in a lowering of your final grade, however, students who miss more than 25% of a semester's class meetings without presenting an acceptable excuse will either be dropped from the class without further notice with a grade of WF (Withdrew Failing), or will automatically receive a final course grade of F (Failure).

If you are absent on the day an exam is given, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor as soon as possible to present an excuse and schedule a makeup. If you miss class, you'll need to arrange to copy notes on what you missed from a classmate. If you are late on the day an exam is given, the instructor may choose not to allow you to take the exam, but will require you to schedule a make-up. Exams missed and not made up will receive a zero.

The dates of all exams are indicated in the course calendar. The date and time of the final exam is in accordance with the university final exam schedule. Please do not purchase airline tickets or make other personal travel plans that conflict with these dates. **Please do not ask to take an exam at another time due to personal travel plans.** Missing an exam due to personal travel cannot be considered an excused absence.

EXAMS:

During the semester, you will be given three non-cumulative preliminary exams. Exams will be administered during the first 30 minutes of class on the dates indicated in the course calendar. In addition, a **comprehensive final exam** covering all course material will be given at the designated final exam time. All exams will be closed book-closed note and conducted in class. Exam grades will be posted to the class website and your graded exam will be available for your review upon request.

FINAL GRADING:

Your final grade will be based on your exam scores. Weighting will be as follows:

3 Exams at 15% each, 1 collaborative project at 20%, 1 Final Exam at 35%

At the end of the semester, your grades will be averaged together according to the above weighting. Letter grades will be assigned based on your final average as follows:

90-100 =A 80-89 =B 70-79 =C 60-69 =D Below 60 =F

Exam grades are not “scaled,” “curved,” or “weighted” except as indicated above and **extra credit assignments will not be made nor accepted.**

COMMUNICATION IN CASE OF CANCELLED CLASSES:

In the event that UNT is forced to close unexpectedly due to weather conditions, a flu outbreak, or other emergency situations, notification will be given through media reports, on the university web site, and through the **Eagle Alert** program. In the event that **course-specific** information needs to be disseminated, the instructor will contact you using your **UNT e-mail address**. All students have been assigned an e-mail address ending in “@myunt.edu” or “@unt.edu.” It is important that you *monitor this e-mail address* for university-related messages. If you do not check your UNT e-mail address regularly, please edit your account settings so that e-mail will be automatically forwarded to an address you do monitor.

UNT CANVAS WEBSITE:

This course uses the Canvas website containing course materials such as handouts and readings, a copy of this syllabus, copies of any Power Points used in class, and links to various media law sites. Your exam scores, class average, and final grade will also be posted on this website. Log on to the Canvas site at **my.unt.edu**.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

MATERIAL OF A SEXUALLY EXPLICIT NATURE:

A portion of this course involves reading about and discussing laws, regulations, and court decisions concerning obscenity, indecency, and sexually explicit materials, and may include discussions or readings that you find to be offensive. If you feel that your beliefs preclude your reading or discussing this material, please discuss the matter with me before we cover the section of the course dealing with obscenity and indecency (dates are noted in the course calendar).

Course Calendar FALL 2026 (Aug. 17 – Dec 11)

This course calendar is a *tentative* schedule of topics to be covered during the semester. All topics, assignments and dates, including exam dates, are subject to change as conditions dictate. All changes will be announced in class. **Sadler** readings are from your assigned **textbook**. Handouts and readings listed as "**PDF**" should be downloaded from the course website.

Date	Topic	Readings
8/17	Course Introduction The American Legal System	Sadler Ch. 1
8/24	<u>ZOOM</u> - First Amendment	Sadler Ch. 2
8/31	Broadcast Regulation	Sadler Ch. 3, 6
9/7	LABOR DAY	
9/14	<u>ZOOM</u> - Cable & Satellite	Sadler Ch. 4
9/21	TEST #1 Social Media	PDF online
9/28	<u>ZOOM</u> - Ownership	Sadler Ch. 5
10/5	Defamation	Sadler Ch. 7
10/12	<u>ZOOM</u> - Privacy	Sadler Ch. 8, 9
10/19	TEST #2 Liability	Sadler Ch. 10
10/26	<u>ZOOM</u> - Obscenity	Sadler Ch. 11
11/2	Indecency/Violence	Sadler Ch. 12
11/9	TEST #3 Copyright	Sadler Ch. 13 Ch. 14
11/16	<u>ZOOM</u> - Advertising	Sadler Ch. 15

11/23

THANKSGIVING WEEK

11/30

COLLABORATION PROJECTS DUE

12/7

Comprehensive **Final Exam** (all course material)