

## COMM-402: Professional Ethics in Communication Philadelphia University, Spring 2015

**Instructor:** Patrick Blanchfield  
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**Class Time:** 6:30-9:30PM

**Office Hours:** Monday, 2-5 at Kanbar  
or by appointment  
**Credit Hours:** 3-0-3  
**Class Location:** Roxboro House RXB201

### Course Description:

This course, designed for the senior in Professional Communication, focuses on important ethical issues facing the profession and its practitioners. The course will not advocate for particular ethical standards, but will strive to motivate students to critically and analytically think about standards that are germane to their personal and professional lives, to consider reasons why current standards are in place, and to evaluate whether current ethical standards are sufficient, workable, and understood by communication professionals.

**Prerequisites:** *COMM 202: Research Methods* and *COMM 307: PR and Media Writing*

### Required Texts:

A Practical Guide to Ethics: Living and Leading with Integrity, Rita C. Manning & Scott R. Stroud, Westview Press, 2008.

The Journalist and the Murderer, Janet Malcolm, Vintage, 1990.

*All other readings will be made available on BlackBoard, distributed in class, or consist of brief news articles, blog posts, and videos easily available online.*

### Course Learning Objectives:

This course has three objectives.

- First, to provide you with a synoptic overview of several different approaches to what we will call *the question of ethics*. Through our readings, you will gain familiarity with various influential philosophical perspectives on what make up basic ethical values and how those values ought to shape the decisions we make. You'll leave the course with not just with an expanded philosophical vocabulary – a familiarity with technical terms like Utilitarianism, maxims, deontology, and virtue ethics – but with a working knowledge of how to deploy those concepts when formulating ethical decisions in everyday life. In other words, you'll have a practical toolkit for recognizing when ethical questions arise in the real world, and several different lenses through which to view them. You'll be able to think systematically about things like the relationship between means and ends,

between individual rights and collective responsibilities, and between principle and practice in ways that will deepen your ability to make ethical decisions.

- Second, to increase your awareness of *the ethical dimensions of communication*. A repeated theme in our course will be how ethics involves not just personal opinions and private beliefs, but the capacity to *communicate* your values, to justify the decisions you make in conversation with others, and to understand and evaluate the decisions and expressions of audiences and interlocutors who may have different opinions and come from very different backgrounds than you. A closely related theme will be how ethical communication involves various *practices* of close reading, attentive listening, and respectfully accommodating the communications of others, practices we'll cultivate through in-class discussions and structured debates. Leaving this course, you should feel more confident not just in communicating your own ethical opinions, and more comfortable when confronted with the opinions of people with whom you might otherwise disagree, but also more attuned to the ethical relationships that can shape the settings in which communication occurs.
- Third, to give you exposure to the *specific ethical challenges faced by communication professionals*. We'll be talking a lot about the nuances of free speech, about the motivations that can drive us to communicate in particular ways, and about how fields like Journalism, Public Relations, and Advertising all pose unique as well as shared ethical challenges to the people who work in them. We'll talk specifically about things like objectivity bias, hate speech, sourcing, whistle-blowing, deceptive advertisement, stereotyping, and much, much more. Through examining numerous case studies, we'll also pay particular attention to the powerful role *narrative* plays in how communication professionals appeal to audiences and frame their messages. Whether you wind up as a journalist or a PR consultant or an advertising executive or a haberdasher, you'll thus leave this course not only as a more empowered *producer* of communication, but also as a more savvy *consumer* of it as well. In other words, by the time we're done, you won't ever look at media, advertisements, or the other messages we encounter every day quite the same way again.

### Grading Breakdown

Participation:	30%	Short Paper #1:	20%
Short Paper #2:	20%	Final Paper:	30%

## Readings

*It is expected that you come to class having read **all** of the assignments listed for that session. Optional, helpful additional readings are noted as such.*

Session 0: (1/19): *No Class – MLK Day / Day of Service*

Because we do not have class on this day, the next session reading load will be double – I encourage you to plan ahead by doing some of that reading during this week.

Session 1: (1/26): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 1 (Introduction); Chapter 2 (Reasoning and Communicating about Values)

- Lawrence Lessig on Institutional Corruption (video) <http://bit.ly/1nr6UHG>
- Eric Fair, “An Iraq Interrogator’s Nightmare” in *The Washington Post* <http://wapo.st/1vVD99Z> and “Orders, Truth, and Torture at Abu Ghraib” in *Utne Reader* <http://bit.ly/YRMQsy>
- Optional: Michael Sokolove, “The Trials of Graham Spanier” in *The New York Times* <http://nyti.ms/1jyA5fy>
- Optional: Eric Fair, “I Can’t Be Forgive for Abu Ghraib” in *The New York Times* <http://nyti.ms/1GggtlP>

Session 2: (2/2): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 3 (Moral Perspectives I)

- Carl Elliot, “The Deadly Corruption of Clinical Trials” in *Mother Jones* <http://bit.ly/VlQzXm>
- Raffi Khatchadourian, “No Secrets: Julian Assange’s Mission for Total Transparency” in *The New Yorker* <http://nyr.kr/1vclQ4y>
- Bill Keller, “Dealing With Assange and the Wikileaks Secrets” in *The New York Times* <http://nyti.ms/1y0xqAH>
- Optional: Alexander Abad-Santos, “Reddit’s ‘Find Boston Bombers’ Founder Says ‘It Was a Disaster’ but ‘Incredible’” in *The Wire* <http://bit.ly/1l62CKo>

Session 3: (2/9): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 4 (Moral Perspectives II)

- Anne Helen Petersen “How I Rebuilt Tinder And Discovered The Shameful Secret Of Attraction” in *Buzzfeed* <http://bzfd.it/1xdP6U0>
- Cord Jefferson, “The Racism Beat” <http://bit.ly/1kKPdVY>

- MJ Dinius, "On the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and Ferguson" in the *LA Review of Books* <http://bit.ly/1vrenf8>
- David Graeber, "Caring Too Much" <http://bit.ly/1jQagDb>
- Optional: Amanda Hess, "Why Women Aren't Welcome on the Internet" <http://bit.ly/1gB2nAZ>

Session 4: (2/16): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 5 (Ethics Around the World)

- Amanda Hess, "The White Knight" <http://slate.me/115lZBr>
- Joshua Keating, "Fake North Korea News Watch: Haircut Edition" <http://slate.me/1htMj1V> and "If It Happened There: In Brutal Contest of Strength and Strategy, a Culture Is Revealed" in *Slate* <http://slate.me/1kk3PJG>
- Stefanie Kelly, "Testing Drugs in the Developing World" in *The Atlantic* <http://theatlntc/1wpbkbK>
- Optional: Freedom House Report on Media on North Korea <http://bit.ly/VNbWqk>

Session 5: (2/23): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 6 (Justice)

- Carl Elliot, Pay No Attention to the Bloody Corpse in the Bathroom, <http://bit.ly/1wpkEMP>
- Sarah Kendzior, "Charity is Not a Substitute for Justice," in *Al Jazeera* <http://aje.me/1gcTzn9>
- Kathy Sierra, "Trouble at the Kool-Aid Point" <http://bit.ly/1CU7bMM>
- Optional: James B. Murphy, Stephen J. A. Ward, & Aine Donovan, "Ethical Ideals in Journalism: Civic Uplift or Telling the Truth?" *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 21 (4), 2006, 322-337.

**Short Paper One Due: 2/28**

Session 6: (3/2): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 7 (Communicating with Integrity)

- Catherine Buni and Soraya Chemaly, "The Unsafety Net: How Social Media Turned Against Women" in *The Atlantic* <http://theatlntc/1s053yf>
- Sarah Kendzior, "The Perils of Hipster Economics," in *Al Jazeera* <http://aje.me/1pydvm9>
- Tressie McMillam Cottom, "When Your (Brown) Body is a (White) Wonderland" <http://bit.ly/1fTYXZc>

- Migizi Pensoneau, "I'll fucking cut you": Behind the scenes of the 1491s' segment on "The Daily Show" <http://bit.ly/1wNV409>
- Optional: Tressie McMillam Cottom, "Who The Fuck Do You Think You Are?" Academic Engagement, Microcelebrity and Digital Sociology from the Far Left of the Matrix of Domination" <http://bit.ly/1ALqxTg>

Session 7: (3/9): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 8 (The World of Work)

- Amanda Hess, "Student Journalists Exposed Columbia University's Rape Crisis. Then One of Their Own Was Accused" in *Slate* <http://slate.me/T3UgX6>
- Richard Pérez-Peña and Kate Taylor "Fight Against Sexual Assaults Holds Colleges to Account" in *The New York Times* <http://nyti.ms/1iRuuK6>
- Optional: Sheila Reaves, Jacqueline Bush Hitchon, Sung-Yeon Park, & Gi Woong Yun, "If Looks Could Kill: Digital Manipulation of Fashion Models," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 19 (1), 2004, 56-71.
- Optional: Jessica Valenti, "Elliot Rodger's California shooting spree: further proof that misogyny kills" in *The Guardian* <http://bit.ly/1tAkQDO>

Session 8: (3/23): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 9 (The Family)

- David Kaczynski, "Missing Parts" in *Brothers* (On BlackBoard)
- Jennifer Mascia, "My Dad was a Secret Murderer" in *The NY Post* <http://bit.ly/1xSwf6d>
- Optional: Jennifer Mascia, "Who Gets Shot in America" <http://bit.ly/1B6AtIs>

### **Paper Two Due: 3/28**

Session 9: (3/30): A Practical Guide to Ethics: Chapter 10 (Global Citizenship)

- NPR's *This American Life* "Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory," <http://bit.ly/VNdHnI>
- NPR's *This American Life* "Retraction," <http://bit.ly/1ALsC1m>
- Optional Hyo-Sook Kim, "Universalism versus Relativism in Public Relations," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 20 (4), 2005, 333-344.

Session 10: (4/6): Janet Malcolm, The Journalist and the Murderer, Part I

## **Research Paper Proposal Due 4/10**

Session 11: (4/13): Janet Malcolm, The Journalist and the Murderer, Part II

Session 12: (4/20): Guest Lecturer (Reading TBA)

Session 13: (4/27): Paper Presentations

## **Research Paper Draft 1 (Optional) Due: 4/30**

## **Research Paper Final Draft Due: 5/10**

### **Course Expectations: My Commitments to You**

*Clarity on Assignments.* Although I reserve the right to modify this syllabus to improve our time together, and pending your ongoing feedback, I will be clear about these changes and give advance notice in doing so.

*Correspondence.* Except on weekends, holidays, and during my notified absences, I will gladly reply to all emails sent to my official Philadelphia University address within 24 hours.

*Feedback.* I will return turned-in materials to you in a timely fashion. If there are specific issues in your work that I want you to work on, I will communicate those issues to you clearly.

*Meetings.* In addition to two required meetings, I will be glad to meet with you and discuss your work, your status in the class, the texts we are reading, or communication ethics in general.

### **Course Expectations: Your Commitments to Me**

*Attend Class.* In accordance with University policy, you are expected to attend class on time every day. If you are absent from class, contact me as soon as possible, preferably before the next class meeting. You remain responsible for any missed work, for work completed in class, and for work due, and must arrange for that work to be delivered to the faculty on time. Serious illness, family emergencies, or other crises mean that you should contact the Dean of Students Office as soon as possible (215-951-2740). You are responsible for all work related to this class; however, pending circumstances, I may be able to allow for some accommodation in terms of time of deadlines. In the case of serious illness or crisis, please consult with me and your academic advisor to determine whether you should withdraw from the course or request an incomplete grade. Also, be aware that the University respects

your right to observe religious holidays. If you plan to be absent from a class due to religious observance, notify me during the first week of classes or otherwise as soon as possible. Understand that absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve you from responsibility for any deadlines or readings required during that period of absence. Talk with me in advance, and we can work out the specifics. Finally, if there's a chance that inclement weather will prevent us from having class, I will contact you beforehand via either email or a BlackBoard announcement, and, per new university guidelines, potentially arrange for alternative instruction possibilities.

*Write.* This is a writing-intensive course. As such, you are required to produce two Short Response Papers (five pages each) and one Final Paper (fifteen pages). Although you will receive more detailed instructions about these papers later in the semester, the first two assignments will involve your responding to a text that we have read together in class, and will involve your making a critical argument about the ethical issues raised by it. For the final paper, you will be presented with a variety of options, but all of them will involve your doing some degree of independent research – on a PR campaign, on media coverage of a specific news event, or on another relevant subject to communications ethics – analyzing it terms of some of the issues we've discussed in class, and addressing how you might approach the same situation differently.

*Turn in Assignments on Time.* As a future communications professional, deadlines will be a part of your life. Whether it's a press release or an ad campaign pitch or a breaking news story, deadlines *matter* – if you turn in the work late, it's useless, “dead,” and consequences can run from your not getting paid to getting fired outright. I take deadlines seriously, too. Unless you make previous arrangements with me (or circumstances like sudden illness come into play) your papers are due to me either in hard copy or in my email inbox by the times I specify. Every day after that, I will deduct a full letter grade for the paper in question, no exceptions.

*Read.* Do the readings. If I start getting worried that you aren't doing the readings, I will begin giving random quizzes about reading material, and that will be just stressful and lame for everybody involved.

*Participate.* Participation in class discussions is important, not just to demonstrate that you've done the readings, but also because both your classmates and I honestly want to hear what you think about them. If you loved something we're reading, say so. If you hated it, say so. And then say why. Above all, if you have questions, ask them.

*Don't Plagiarize.* As students and communicators, drawing on sources plays a key role in formulating your own ideas, and citing them makes your writing more persuasive and enhances your credibility as a thinker. By the same token, using sources improperly or copying from them wholesale constitutes plagiarism, and is unacceptable. It is your responsibility to represent in your writing all ideas or

phrases that are not your own through the appropriate forms of citations. If you feel that time pressures or other issues may be overwhelming you, rather than plagiarize (which, arguably, takes up as much time as actually writing your own work), talk to me.

*Follow University Policies on Academic Integrity.* Over the course of this semester, we will have many discussions about what it means to communicate ethically, and about the ethical challenges that arise in communicating in different contexts and media. Although many of these discussions may raise thorny philosophical questions, within the context of Philadelphia University more broadly, and of our seminar work in particular, there are specific policies about Academic Integrity about which you as a student are obligated to be aware. These policies encompass your intentions, decisions, and actions while conducting academic work. They include values such as avoidance of the following: cheating; plagiarism; copying; the fabrication of information; and facilitating, or denying others access to information. Philadelphia University expects honesty and rigor in research, course work, writing and publishing, and so do I. Any student violating the University's academic integrity policy will be subject to appropriate sanctions. The University's complete academic integrity policy is available in the 2014-15 Academic Catalog: <http://bit.ly/1whpM5m> and <http://bit.ly/1zcgxjf>. While we will explicitly talk about both the concept of plagiarism and discuss citation mechanics in class, academic resources, including information on citation and documentation for all written work, projects, and presentations, are also available on the Learning and Advising Center's website: <http://bit.ly/1niTDAT>.

*Be Aware of University Resources that Exist to Help You.* These resources include:

- (1) **Gutman Library** ([www.philau.edu/library](http://www.philau.edu/library)), a gateway to a variety of information resources. The homepage of the library provides 24/7 access to online databases of articles, e-journal collections, e-books, and specialized information to support your coursework. See a list of Research Guides for specific programs and courses at <http://libguides.philau.edu/start>. The library building is wireless, has 80 available workstations (PCs and Macs), printers, scanners, and copiers; as well as individual and group study spaces.
- (2) **The Learning and Advising Center** ([www.philau.edu/learning](http://www.philau.edu/learning)), which provides one-on-one tutoring assistance for writing, study strategies, test taking, and specific Philadelphia University courses. To make a tutoring appointment, students should stop by the Learning and Advising Center in Haggard Hall or call (215) 951-2799. Academic resources, including information on citation and documentation, note taking, and study strategies are available on the Center's website.
- (3) **Technology Resources** (<http://www.philau.edu/OIT/>). The University provides wireless network access in all campus buildings. If you need a computer, Gutman Library and Search Hall have open access computers. For assistance with technology issues, students should contact the Technology Help Desk at (215) 951-4648 or send an email to [helpdesk@philau.edu](mailto:helpdesk@philau.edu).