

COMM 3017 (1 & 2)

“ETHICS IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION”



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Web Site: MSVU Moodle Live site

COURSE OVERVIEW

COMM 3017 is a required course for all students registered in the Bachelor of Public Relations degree and the minor in Communication Technology. It is designed to provide an overview of ethical theories and principles that are useful for the development of a framework for ethical

Devil's Advocate

- A person who advocates an opposing or unpopular cause for the sake of argument or to expose it to a thorough examination.
- Also called promoter of the faith. Rom. Cath. Ch. an official appointed to present arguments against a proposed beatification or canonization of a *beatus*.

decision-making in the professional practice of public communication across sectors. One of the most important aspects of this course is that it affords you the opportunity to examine your own personal value system and compare it with the value systems inherent in what is conventionally described as ethical practice in public communication.

The underlying ethical principles are brought into sharp focus by their application to real, timely issues that are common in life and public communication practice.

You are required to demonstrate a high degree of critical analysis when examining actual cases and scenarios, and when applying your new knowledge to the solutions of ethical dilemmas in the field.

My most important roles in this course are to be the Devil's Advocate and a gadfly. Also note that we will use the concept of the "thought experiment" to consider hypothetical situations.

Thought Experiment

- "A device of the imagination that is used to investigate the nature of things."
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- An attempt to learn something new simply by thinking about it.

Gadfly

- A fly that bites livestock
- An annoying person; particularly a person who provokes others into action by asking annoying questions.
- A person who upsets your status quo.

PRE-REQUISITE KNOWLEDGE

There is a reasonable expectation that students are familiar with public communication as both a field of study and as representative of a number of industries including public relations, journalism, science communication, corporate communication etc. Students who do not have the calendar-specific pre-requisite will be dropped from the class roster.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of COMM 3017, you should be able to:

- 1) Discuss the historical developments in public communication practice that are reflected in ethical dilemmas faced today.
- 2) Discuss fundamentals of ethical theory that provide a basis for ethical decision-making in practice, comparing and contrasting differing approaches.
- 3) Identify the basic principles upon which ethical public communication practice is based.
- 4) Develop rationales for making defensible ethical decisions.
- 5) Identify and discuss important current issues resulting in ethical dilemmas in practice.
- 6) Evaluate the effectiveness of codes of ethics in professional disciplines.
- 7) Demonstrate thoughtful reflection on ethics issues inherent in everyday practice.
- 8) Reflect on a personal code of ethics.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES & NOTES

Each individual student is responsible for the following:

- Show up, pay attention, be honest, don't be attached to the outcomes, don't take anything at face value and do more than the minimum.
- Treat everyone in the class, including the prof with respect.
- All assignments have strict deadlines to which we will adhere firmly. ***I will not mark late assignments unless we have made a prior agreement.*** If you are going to have difficulty meeting a deadline, discuss it with me in advance and it may be possible for us to make other fair arrangements if I am convinced of the validity and seriousness of your problem. At the very least, I expect honesty – this is an ethics course, after all.
- Team work: It is important that you participate fully as a member of your team. If your team members identify you as a slacker, you will be penalized by being required to complete the entire assignment by yourself. Trust me, this is something you will want to avoid.

- "Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of written assignments." MSVU Calendar
- "Students who have a disability and who require academic accommodations must register with Disability Services as early as possible in order to receive accommodations." (<http://www.msvu.ca/disabilityservices>)
- "University regulations on plagiarism and cheating and other academic offences will be strictly enforced." These regulations including applicable procedures and penalties are detailed in the University Calendar and are posted on department notice boards and on the website at www.msvu.ca on the Current Students page under Academic Offenses."
- Please! During class, no caps with peaks and no gum chewing! And absolutely no cell phone usage unless directed to do so by the professor. I will afford you the same courtesy. And please be on time. Latecomers disrupt discussion, and I reserve the right to refuse admittance to latecomers if they are disturbing other students. Tablets are, of course, permitted in class for the purposes of note-taking only. Use of a laptop in class is subject to class consensus since it can be distracting. If you are using laptops, tablets or cell phones in class for any activity other than note-taking or as directed by the prof from time to time, you will be asked to either leave the classroom or surrender it.

Please note that your ***perception of your effort***, by itself, is not enough to justify a high grade. You will have to meet course objectives.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

To obtain a reasonably good grade in this course, you must attend all classes.

To meet the objectives set out for this course it is mandatory that you do the assigned reading, complete all assignments to the best of your ability, and that you attend class. Although I have no intention of giving you a grade for attendance, you will see as you review the evaluation scheme that missing even one class will almost certainly result in lost marks. So, right now, at the beginning of the term, make a promise to yourself that you will attend all classes in this course this term.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES WRITING COMPETENCE REQUIREMENT

BASIC WRITING COMPETENCE IS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR PASSING THIS COURSE

Since writing is an important part of our field's professional practice, the Department of Communication Studies cannot allow its students to graduate or intern if they do not have the ability to write correct English. Consequently, writing competence is a requirement in all department courses, and it must be demonstrated in all classes. This means that students who fail more than one assignment in this course as a result of a lack of writing competence will not pass, regardless the accumulation of points they achieve through team work, class participation, etc.

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The department plays a significant role in developing student writing; however, it does not offer instruction in basic writing skills because these skills are beneath the academic level at which undergraduate courses occur. The faculty presumes that every student's general education included a minimum of twelve years of writing-skills training, and therefore reasonably expects an English language competence in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and semantics. The responsibility to achieve that minimal standard lies with the student.

The professor will not suspend this requirement by virtue of a student's willingness to obtain remedial writing instruction. Public communication practice is writing intensive, and employers expect graduates to excel as writers, in comparison with the general public. Consequently the department requires the actual existence of writing skills, rather than the hope or the promise of these skills, as a condition for academic progress.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PROTECTION STATEMENT

The lectures and materials provided to students in this course are the property of the professor unless otherwise acknowledged. Class lectures may not be recorded in any form without prior permission from the professor and any guest lecturers who may speak to this class. Recordings, class notes, slides and other materials provided may not be used for anything other than study purposes and may not be reproduced in any manner without permission. Materials may be downloaded from the class site and single copies made for personal academic use.

ASSIGNED TEXTBOOK

In order to pass this course, you will read the following textbook:

Parsons, Patricia J. (2008). *Ethics in public relations: A guide to best practice*. 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

BOOKS FOR ENRICHMENT

In order to do well in this course, you will consider reading or at least referring to the following books:

- Bivins, Thomas. (2004). *Mixed media: Moral distinctions in advertising, public relations and journalism*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cohen, Randy. (2002). *The good, the bad and the difference: How to tell right from wrong in everyday situations*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Fitzpatrick, Kathy. & Bronstein, Carolyn. Eds. (2006). *Ethics in public relations: Responsible advocacy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Frankfurt, Harry. (2005). *On bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Irwin, William (ed.). (2000). *Seinfeld and philosophy: A book about everything and nothing*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Nash, Laura. (1995). *Good intentions aside: A manager's guide to resolving ethical problems*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Nelson, Joyce. (1989). *The Sultans of sleaze: Public relations and the media*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press.
- O'Hara, Kieron. (2004). *Trust: From Socrates to spin*. Cambridge (UK): Icon Books Ltd.
- Rampton, Sheldon and John Stauber. (2001). *Trust us, we're experts! How industry manipulates science and gambles with your future*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/ Putnam.

CLASS MOODLE SITE

There is a complementary online site for this course stored on the MSVU Moodle site. We will use this site for the following purposes:

- Posting documents (e.g. course outline, pdf's of class slides etc.)
- Uploading assignments as directed
- Posting enrichment material including web links and articles
- Communicating with you directly. (I will use the email on your profile; you will use patricia.parsons@msvu.ca to contact me). We will not use Moodle messaging.
- Student posting of interesting materials that could be the focus of in-class discussions.

Please check this site at least twice a week.

MARKING SCHEME

Assignment	Worth...	Due Date Section 1	Due Date Section 2
Individual: Reflections on Ethics Insights Part 1 Reflections #1-5	30%	October 30	October 11
Team: Legacy Assignment: E-book on professional ethics	40%	December 2	November 27
Individual: Reflections on Ethics Insights Part 2 Reflections #6-10	30%	December 4	November 29

Note Well:

You can be given an “F” for any assignment that fails to meet the level of writing competence expected of students at the 3000-level in Communication Studies.

You will also receive a final grade of “F” if you fail to submit an assignment, regardless of the accumulation of other points.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

1 – REFLECTIONS ON ETHICS INSIGHTS

This is a very important assignment both to enhance your learning and for me to evaluate your progress. The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with an opportunity *to synthesize the content* presented in this course. To synthesize means to combine a number of elements into a cohesive whole.

It further provides you with an opportunity to create a personal narrative essay that chronologically maps the development of your thoughts and feelings about ethics in your personal and professional life within the framework of content that unfolds in class.

The purpose of a synthesis is to make insightful connections between two or more ideas to come up with a new way of looking at things.

You will make weekly entries into a personal journal in which you will reflect on what you are learning and how you are learning it. You should consider purchasing a personal journal to bring to class to make notes that you will then use to translate into a coherent narrative for submission.

- ❖ After each class is over (I suggest you not wait too long – that night, perhaps), you will write out your reactions to the content, readings, videos, debates and discussions in class with some sense of what you personally have learned. You might also consider how the material has had an effect on your life outside class (e.g. discussions with friends or family that are informed by the class material).

In addition to your personal reflection, you will reflect on a question I will present at the end of each class. If you are not in class, you will not have access to that question.

- ❖ You will make ten entries: the first five are due to be submitted together half-way through the term; the final five at the end. There are no word count limits.
- ❖ You will be graded on the thoughtfulness of your reflections, your ability to connect the ideas discussed in class with one another and to the ideas in the readings, movies, cases, videos etc., completeness of your reflections (class content, reading, videos, discussions etc.) and of course style issues will play a part.
- ❖ If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are aware of the material covered. You must then indicate in your journal entry that you missed it and include your reason for missing the class. You are invited to contribute reflections on missed classes based on your readings etc., but you will doubtless lose marks.

- ❖ Please ensure that the narrative is well-written, personalized and scrupulously copy-edited. I hope that I do not even need to mention at this stage that it is to be prepared on MS Word and saved to an electronic document that is to be uploaded to the specific assignment centre on our class Moodle site. Mac users please save in rtf format.

Please name the document with your last name first.

- Use either 12 pt. Times Roman or 11 pt. Cambria font
- Double-spaced with paragraph indents.
- Left –justified margin (not fully justified)
- Page numbers in upper right corner
- A cover page with your name on it!

3- THE LEGACY ASSIGNMENT: THE CREATION OF AN E-BOOK

The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with an opportunity ***to both synthesize and apply the content*** presented in this course.

This is a team assignment that is worth 40% of your final grade for COMM 3017. This is a large assignment and the participation of every team member is essential.

The reason that this is called a ‘legacy assignment’ is this: As a student, you spend a lot of time working on papers, assignments etc. and once the semester is over, the only place where that work continues to live is in the learning that you take from it. This time, you have the opportunity to leave a legacy.

This assignment requires you to participate in the creation of an e-book on professional ethics. Each team has a specific chapter or section assignment and will present their work to the class as part of the ongoing creation process.

When the class has finished the creation of the book, it will be edited and distributed as a downloadable e-book. If you would like to have a bound copy of the book for your portfolio, you will be given instructions on how to obtain one.

We will discuss this in much greater detail in two weeks when we will discuss the nature of teams and at which time I will distribute a document detailing the specific requirements for the assignment.