

COM 4770 “We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live”
-- Socrates

Communication Ethics

Spring 2011

Tuesdays and Thursdays

12:30-1:45 p.m.

Brown 3002

#12559

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays
2-3:30 p.m. and by appointment

Course materials

All assigned readings are on electronic reserve.

Catalog description

Ethical theories and justification models are studied and related to ethical decision making in a variety of communication contexts, including mass media, organizational communication and interpersonal communication. The course will examine the components of good ethical decision making in communication, as well as obstacles that can stand in the way of responsible choices.

About the course

This course encourages you to explore what it means to be a responsible communicator in your work and personal life. We will consider such

issues as the permissibility of lying, whistle blowing, and the demands of personal integrity. The course will examine each of the four processes involved in behaving morally: moral sensitivity, moral reasoning, moral commitment and moral perseverance. We will use ethical theories and other decision-making aids to help us reason through ethical problems in communication. To help us exercise our moral imaginations, we will immerse ourselves in the rich narrative of the film “Doubt” to gain appreciation for the roles of motivation and context in promoting and inhibiting good ethical choices.

About the professor

I joined the COM faculty in 1996. My Ph.D. in mass communications (journalism) is from Indiana University. My research area is the topic of this course: communication ethics, with an emphasis on media ethics. I've published articles in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, Communication Monographs, the International Journal of Applied Philosophy* and *Southern Communication Journal*. I also am a contributor to several books on journalism and professional ethics. My book, *Journalism as Practice*, won the 2008 Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award and the National Communication Association's 2008 top book award in applied ethics. My other books are *Ethics and Entertainment* (with Howard Good) and *Making Hard*

Choices in Journalism Ethics (with David Boeyink). I am co-director of Western's Center for the Study of Ethics in Society and serve as the faculty sponsor of WMU's national ethics bowl team.

Course objectives

1. Heightened sensitivity to the ethical issues that permeate communication practices.
2. The ability to reason systematically through ethical problems so that you can justify your choices to your boss, your peers, your clients, the public--and yourself.
3. A sense of what you stand for and a commitment to personal responsibility.

Your responsibilities

1. Academic dishonesty: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty. I will follow up on any evidence of copying someone else's work, not doing your own work, collaborating on individual assignments without prior authorization, making up citations, passing off someone else's work and other forms of dishonesty. Examples of academic dishonesty include turning in a paper someone else has written, copying or paraphrasing materials from a source without proper documentation, and leaving out quotation marks for materials taken word-for-word from a web site. These are all offenses against the university's policies pertaining to academic integrity.

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Undergraduate Catalog that pertain to

Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. The policies can be found at <http://catalog.wmich.edu> under Academic Policies, Student Rights and Responsibilities. You should also consult WMU's Honor Code at <http://osc.wmich.edu>.

If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test. See "How to properly credit sources" on electronic reserve for more information. Acadia University's plagiarism tutorial at <http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/> is highly recommended (select the player Emma for APA style tips).

2. Classroom etiquette: Ethics is not a spectator sport. Discussion and critical thinking are vital for learning the material covered in this class. I will ask you to be actively involved, whether it be role-playing or brainstorming in small groups. Many of the things you need to know to do well on your assignments--crucial concepts, application of theories, etc.--you will learn through such activities. That is why good attendance is essential.

Please feel free to bring examples of ethically problematic cases to class whenever you like. Everyone's perspective is appreciated and encouraged. However, for discussion to be useful and respectful, everyone must be attentive, courteous, engaged and

constructive. That means: listening (not talking or texting!) when others talk; waiting your turn to speak; refraining from ridiculing, attacking or making racist, sexist or discriminatory remarks; doing your fair share of group tasks; refraining from monopolizing discussion time; and putting away materials unrelated to class. (That includes your cell phone! If I see you looking at your phone during class, I will count this the same way I do tardies and early departures for purposes of your attendance grade; see **Attendance** below.)

Research has shown that multi-tasking interferes with comprehension and concentration (for a report on the latest research, see "Media Multitaskers Pay Mental Price, Study Shows" on electronic reserve). Active listening and note taking, on the other hand, increase attention (which is why I do not post or e-mail lecture notes). Besides, focusing on something else is rude to me and your classmates. So **no laptops, cell phones or other electronic devices in class**. If you're having trouble keeping up with lectures, let me know. I'll be glad to slow down, repeat information or give more examples.

You also should get in the habit of offering reasons for whatever position you voice. In this class, we don't take opinions at face value.

Much discussion will take place in small groups. I have at least three reasons for this. First, I hope the small groups will provide a supportive, "safe" environment in which you can try out new ideas and consider different perspectives. Second, you will improve your ethical reasoning skills by expressing, discussing and defending your ideas to others. Finally, much decision making in organizations is collaborative; just as in this class, you may end up teamed at work with

strangers who are quite different from you. Real-world decision making in ethics doesn't take place in a vacuum. You will find some practical tips on managing group activities on e-reserve under "A word about groups"

3. Attendance: I expect you to attend all classes and to read all assigned readings *before* coming to class. We can learn together only if everyone comes and if everyone comes prepared. Sometimes classes will explicitly cover the readings; at other times they won't. In any case, I will presume you have done the readings and will not merely summarize these in class. Since you will be responsible for all course content--whether it be in the assigned readings, or covered in class discussion, or conveyed in a clip--it's not enough *just* to read or *just* to come to class.

You can earn points for attending class. It is important to note that what I am doing is *giving you credit* for attending class (rather than factoring attendance into your grade *only* as a penalty for exceeding a given limit on absences). This means you shouldn't think of having "freebies" that don't count "against you" should you miss class. (This means I don't "excuse" individual absences.) Instead, those who attend class more will get more credit for attendance.

Of course, I realize that missing class here and there sometimes is inevitable because of job conflicts, bad weather, mild illness, family obligations, religious observances, etc. (see WMU's policy on religious observance at www.wmich.edu/registrar). Therefore, the attendance grade is set up so that you can miss class occasionally and still earn substantial credit. I suggest you miss class only when necessary so that you don't find yourself toward the end of the term having a lower attendance

grade than you would like.

Your attendance grade will be calculated as follows:

- 0 absences=40 points (A)
- No more than 1 absence=39 points (A)
- No more than 2 absences=38 points (A)
- No more than 3 absences=34 points (B)
- No more than 4 absences=30 points (C)
- No more than 5 absences=26 points (D)
- Subsequent absences=2 points each (E)

Three tardies/early departures will count as one absence. Regardless of when I take attendance, you are late if you arrive 5 minutes or later after class is scheduled to begin.

You should keep me abreast of circumstances, such as extended illness, university-sponsored athletic events, or religious observances, that will keep you from coming to class for two or more class periods. You may be able to recoup some of your attendance points in cases of such prolonged absence if you produce verifiable documentary evidence (*any* string of absences will result in at least *some* reduction in credit in order to be fair; at the same time, I don't want prolonged absences outside your control to have an *undue* impact on your attendance grade).

Examples of verifiable documentary evidence are a doctor's note or court papers; evidence must be produced **THE DAY YOU RETURN TO CLASS** in cases of unexpected prolonged absence, unless otherwise authorized. **Documentation will not be accepted after the final exam.** If you know ahead of time of circumstances that will keep you out of class for several periods (such as athletic commitments), you should inform me **RIGHT AWAY** so we can discuss the impact on your attendance grade. **The only time you need to provide documentation is in**

cases of prolonged absence.

4. Deadlines and exam dates: Any assignments are due at the BEGINNING of class. Any turned in 5 minutes or later after class is scheduled to begin on the due date will be considered late. The following penalties will apply to late assignments:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| by 5 p.m. on due date | 5% penalty |
| by 12:30 p.m. next day | 10% penalty |
| by 5 p.m. next day | 15% penalty |
| by 12:30 p.m. 2 nd day | 20% penalty |

If you are turning in a late assignment outside of class, and I am not in my office, you should have the COM office assistant on the 3rd floor of Sprau put the assignment in my mailbox. **Do not slip late assignments under my office door.** I will not accept assignments more than 2 days late; they will receive a grade of zero.

However, I will grant extensions at no penalty in cases of emergencies, serious illness and deaths in the immediate family. To receive an extension for an assignment, you must convince me **BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT IS DUE** that it is impossible for you to turn it in early (for example, before you have to leave town) or make other arrangements to turn it in on time (for example, having a friend drop it off). You must also produce verifiable documentation. Examples of verifiable documentary evidence are a doctor's note or court papers; evidence must be produced by the next class period after the original due date unless otherwise authorized. **Documentation will not be accepted after the final exam.**

Exams may be made up in cases of emergencies, serious illness and deaths in the immediate family. If you are unable to take an exam at the

scheduled time, you must contact me BEFORE THE EXAM. If that is impossible, you must contact me as soon as you can after the exam. **Do not wait until the next class period to ask for a make-up exam.** Do not assume that you have been authorized to take a make-up exam just because you left a voice-mail message or an e-mail message. Make-up exams must be taken at the time assigned. You must produce verifiable documentation when you arrive for your make-up exam unless otherwise authorized.

Documentation will not be accepted after the final exam. Examples of verifiable documentary evidence are a doctor's note or court papers.

Job interviews and commitments, computer glitches, assignments/exams for other courses, personal travel plans, oversleeping, and forgetting will not normally be considered as grounds for waiving late penalties or making up exams. Start work on your assignments early enough to leave yourself some margin for error if something goes wrong at the last minute or to account for anticipated schedule conflicts.

Double-check instructions to make sure you have met all requirements.

5. Learning assistance: Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations *must* contact me and the office of Disabled Student Resources and Services (387-2116) at the *beginning* of the semester. See WMU's policies at www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices. Although electronic devices are strictly prohibited, students whose first language is not English may use a paper dictionary during exams with prior authorization.

Assignments

Below are *brief* descriptions of the required assignments. You will receive further instructions. Assignment dates are subject to change. For graded assignments other than in-class assignments, put only your assigned Class ID number, not your name. **Assignments will not be accepted via e-mail except in extraordinary circumstances and must be authorized in advance.**

1. Ethics Bowl project: This assignment is designed to give you some practice applying the theories we'll be learning. The activity is modeled after the national ethics bowl contest in which WMU participates every year. Groups will be assigned early in the term to start working on the *Ethics bowl cases* to be handed out in class. Each group member will be "in charge" of arguing one of these cases. On **Feb. 1**, you will turn in for an individual grade an annotated bibliography summarizing your research on your case. On **Feb. 22**, you will turn in a draft outline and a completed deliberation worksheet for the argument you are developing for your case. This will be for feedback only; however, you will be penalized on your written argument and final outline if you do not complete this requirement satisfactorily. On **March 22**, you will turn in a written argument based on your analysis for an individual grade. Finally, you will turn in a finalized outline of your argument to me for an individual grade on **April 5**. The outlines will constitute each team's "playbook" for the in-class practice competition on **April 12, April 14 and April 19**. Therefore, you are also required to distribute your outline to your teammates via hard copy or e-mail. The competition will allow you to deliver your

polished arguments and to receive immediate feedback from the “judges.” All teams will get to argue at least two cases and to serve in the role of judges once. The competition is for practice and discussion purposes. However, you will receive an **Ethics Bowl participation grade** assessing your contributions and cooperativeness for the project, including your performance during the in-class competition. You will have some time in class to meet in your teams.

2. Midterm: There will be an exam on **Feb. 15** on the material we have covered in class up to that point. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and true-false questions that ask you to demonstrate recall and understanding of the different ethical theories and strategies you have learned. Make-up exams will be given only under extenuating circumstances under the same terms as paper extensions. See **Deadlines and exam dates** above.

3. Final exam: The final exam for this course will consist of questions that ask you to demonstrate recall, understanding and application of the different ethical theories and strategies you have learned throughout the semester. The questions will be a combination of multiple-choice and true-false. Make-up exams will be given only under extenuating circumstances under the same terms as extensions. See **Deadlines and exam dates** above. **The final exam is scheduled for 2:45-4:45 p.m. Tuesday, April 26.**

4. In-class activities: Short writing and small-group assignments will be frequently assigned in class to help you assess and extend your understanding of the assigned readings and class discussions. Your 10 highest scores (each activity is worth 4 points) will be counted toward your course grade, up to 40 points total (the other scores will be dropped). These activities may be given any time during class, and cannot be made up under any circumstances – whether it’s because you’re not here, or you’re late, or you step out, or you leave early.

5. Learning logs: It will be much easier for you to follow lectures and get answers you need if you read the assigned material before coming to class. Research also shows that student achievement increases when students do the assigned reading. To encourage you to keep up with the readings, to engage actively with them, and to come to class prepared, I am offering extra credit for learning logs.

To get credit, you must turn in the learning log for a reading on the day for which it is assigned (In other words, you cannot turn in a log late or early). Each learning log should be no more than one page (front and back). Split each page into two columns. In the left column, write down your notes on the reading. In the right column, write down the questions you have based on the reading. Each log is worth 3 points and will be graded on a $\sqrt{-}$, $\sqrt{}$, $\sqrt{+}$ system. Late logs (turned in more than 5 minutes after class is scheduled to start) will be penalized 1 point. Logs may be hand-written as long as your writing is legible. There is no limit on how many logs you may turn in.

Grading

I will give you a report of your standing in the course halfway through the term and again right before the final. I will be glad to show you the total points you have earned at any time during the semester. If you want me to review a grade, you must submit your rationale **IN WRITING WITHIN TWO CLASS PERIODS** of when you got back the graded assignment. This written rationale must make specific reference to my comments and to the grading criteria (see detailed instructions for grading criteria). Be aware that my review may result in a **LOWER** grade than previously assigned. I encourage you to come talk to me any time during the semester about problems you may be experiencing while there is still time to do something about them.

The assignments will count as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Annotated bibliography | 60 points (15%) |
| Midterm exam | 60 points (15%) |
| Final argument | 100 points (25%) |
| Outline | 20 points (5%) |
| Participation grade | 20 points (5%) |
| Final exam | 60 points (15%) |
| In-class activities | 40 points (10%) |
| Attendance | 40 points (10%) |

Your final grade will be based on the percentage of the total 400 points you earn. Here's the scale I'll follow:

| | |
|---------------|----|
| 100-94% | A |
| 93-87 % | BA |
| 86-83% | B |
| 82-77% | CB |
| 76-70% | C |
| 69-65% | DC |
| 64-60% | D |
| 59% and below | E |

Important dates

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bibliography | Feb. 1 |
| Midterm exam | Feb. 15 |
| Draft outline/worksheet | Feb. 22 |
| Spring break | Feb. 28-March 4 |
| Last day to withdraw | March 22 |
| Written argument | March 22 |
| Final outline | April 5 |
| Ethics bowl | April 12, April 14, April 19 |
| Final exam | April 26 |

Tentative schedule

Accessing the readings: Except for the packet of materials related to the Ethics Bowl project, all assigned readings may be found on e-reserve through Waldo Library's course reserves system at <http://www.wmich.edu/library/reserves/>. To access these readings, you will need to create an account on this site (if you don't have one already) using your BroncoNet ID and system password. Add COM 4770 to your list, then enter a password that will be given in class. During subsequent log-ins, the class will automatically appear on your account, and you will not be required to enter the password. Assigned readings from the Ethics Bowl project packet are marked with (H); they will be handed out in class.

Getting the most out of the readings: You will benefit most from the assigned readings if you do them before class and if you engage actively with them. Some key ways to do this are to preview the readings by looking at chapter introductions, summaries and subheadings first, asking questions about what you're reading as you read, and making notes to yourself (in the margins and in a notebook) to remind yourself of key points, key insights, and key questions you have about the reading (better than highlighting!). For more tips, see John Weber's excellent advice at <http://www.ocean.edu/readcoltext/howtoreadcollegetextdrjohnweber.htm>. See "Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits" on e-reserve for some research-backed tips for studying more effectively too. Remember, you may turn in learning logs for extra credit!

- (1) Jan. 11 **Introduction to the course**
- Jan. 13 **What is ethics?**
Read:
Why Study Ethics? (Jaksa), pp. 1-17
Thinking For Yourself (Weston)
- (2) Jan. 18 **Meet in teams**
Read:
A Word About Groups
Ethics bowl cases and *Ethics bowl assignment instructions*, up to
"Written argument" (H)
- Jan. 20 **Bibliography prep**
Meet at Waldo Library Classroom A (Room 1070) for library
instruction. See Floor Plan at
http://www.wmich.edu/library/about/floorplans/_pdf/01.pdf

- (3) Jan. 25 **Reason and ethics**
 Read:
Ethics-Avoidance Disorders (Weston)
Why Study Ethics? (Jaksa), pp. 18-23
- Jan. 27 **Justification in ethics: The case of lying**
 Read:
Lying (Knowlton)
- (4) Feb. 1 **Test of publicity: Application**
 Read:
Case VIII-D. Faking photos: Is It Ever Justified? (Patterson) (**print case and bring to class**)
Bibliography due
- Feb. 3 **Doing your duty: Kant and Ross**
 Read:
The Role of Ethical Theory (Boeyink & Borden, pp. 33-35)
- (5) Feb. 8 **Calculating consequences: Bentham and Mill**
 Read:
The Role of Ethical Theory (Boeyink & Borden, pp.35-37)
- Feb. 10 **Applying”doing” theories: A case of “Doubt”**
 No reading
- (6) Feb. 15 **Midterm exam**
- Feb. 17 **Group time**
Ethics bowl assignment, sections on “Argument”
- (7) Feb. 22 **Ethics Bowl preview**
 No reading
Draft outline and deliberation worksheet due
- Feb. 24 **Secrecy**
 Read:
Secrecy and Moral Choice (Bok)
- (8) March 1 SPRING BREAK
- March 3 SPRING BREAK
- (9) March 8 **Showing you care: Noddings**
 Read:
Feminism and the Ethics of Care (Rachels)

- March 10 **Movie screening**
No reading
- (10) March 15 **Showing your character: Aristotle**
Read:
Guidelines for Making Ethical Decisions (Patterson), pp. 6-8
- March 17 **Movie screening**
No reading
- (11) March 22 **Applying being theories: More “Doubt”**
No reading
Written arguments due
Last day to drop with a W
- March 24 **Casuistry: Paradigm cases**
Read:
The Paradigm Case as Ethical Standard (Boeyink & Borden)
Why Study Ethics? (Jaksa): cases on “Authorship and the Use of Scientific Data” on pp. 32-34 (***print cases and bring to class***)
- (12) March 29 **Casuistry: Matching characteristics**
Read:
Using Case Comparisons to Make Ethical Choices (Boeyink & Borden)
Ethics Bowl assignment, “Outline” (H)
- March 31 **The subordinate’s dilemma**
Read:
The Courageous Conscience (Kelley)
What Would You Do? (Wallace) (***print case and bring to class***)
- (13) April 5 **Resistance: What’s ethical?**
No reading
Final outlines due
- April 7 **Ethics bowl prep**
Ethics Bowl assignment, “Practice competition” section (H)
- (14) April 12 **Ethics bowl**
No reading
- April 14 **Ethics bowl**
No reading
- (15) April 19 **Ethics bowl**

No reading

April 21 **Review for final exam**

FINAL EXAM: 2:45-4:45 TUESDAY, APRIL 26

Portions of this syllabus were adapted from Dave Boeyink, Cindy Brown, Kris Bunton, Brian Schrag and Anne McCarthy.

Citations for copyrighted materials on electronic reserve

Boeyink, D., & Borden, S.L. (2010). *Making hard choices in journalism ethics: Cases and practice*, chapters 3 and 4. New York: Routledge.

Bok, S. (1982). Secrecy and moral choice. In *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation* (pp. 15-28). New York: Pantheon

Bok, S. (1995). Lying. In (S.R. Knowlton & P.R. Parsons, Eds.) *The journalist's moral compass* (pp.147-154). Westport, CT: Praeger

Jaksa, J., & Pritchard, M.S. (1994). *Communication ethics: Methods of analysis*, 2nd ed., chapter 1

Kelley, R.E.(1992). The power of followership: How to create leaders people want to follow and followers who lead themselves. New York: Doubleday.

Patterson, P., & Wilkins, L. (1994). *Media ethics: Issues and cases*, 2nd ed. (Pp. 26-15). Madison, WI: Wm Brown.

Rachels, J. (2003). *The elements of moral philosophy*, 4th ed., chapter 12. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Van Meter, J. (1994). Case VIII-D. Faking photos: Is it ever justified? In P. Patterson & L. Wilkins, *Media ethics: Issues and cases*, 2nd ed., pp. 216-217. Madison, WI: Wm Brown

Wallace, D. (1996). What would you do - fudge the numbers or leave? *Business Ethics*, 58-59.

Weston, An. (2008). *A 21st century ethical toolbox*, chapter 2. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weston, A. (1997). *A practical companion to ethics*, chapter 2. New York: Oxford University Press.