



**Iona College**  
**Department of Mass Communication**

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**MCO 300, Section A, Media Law and Ethics**

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Office Hours: 8:30-9:15 a.m.; 1-2, 3:30-5 p.m.,  
Mondays, Wednesdays; and by appointment.

Semester/Year: Fall 2012

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**Course Description:**

The legal and ethical issues related to the practice of mass communication: federal and state laws regulating the media; freedom of information, libel, privacy, access, copyright, obscenity, advertising and broadcast regulation; ethical issues and problems related to the media; social responsibility and self-regulation.

**Course Prerequisites:** MCO 200 and sophomore standing.

**Readings:**

- The required book for this course, [Understanding Media Law and Ethics \(2012\)](#) by Jack Breslin, is published by Cognella Academic Publishing and distributed by University Readers, Inc. The book is now available for purchase through the University Readers' student e-commerce store [\[https://students.universityreaders.com/store/\]](https://students.universityreaders.com/store/). Instructions for purchase will be provided to the class prior to the first session.
- Additional assigned readings will be posted on Blackboard and distributed in class.

**Professional Values and Competencies of ACEJMC**

Individual professions in journalism and mass communication may require certain specialized values and competencies. Irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

1. understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
2. demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
3. demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
4. demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
5. understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
6. demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
7. think critically, creatively and independently;
8. conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
9. write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
10. critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
11. apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
12. apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

### **Specific Course Objectives:**

This course is intended to give students an appreciation and understanding of the First Amendment rights and responsibilities from both the legal and ethical perspectives through critical thinking, applicable theory, practical analysis and ethical decision making.

By the end of this course, the student would be able to:

- Think critically about existing American media law and ethics, as well as possible alternatives (PVC 1, 2; Assessment Tool #1, 2, 3, 4);

- Assess the applicability/inapplicability of existing media law and ethics to new media and new controversies involving conflicting rights (PVC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; Assessment Tool #2, 3,4, 5);
- Be able to recognize when, as a working media professional, one might be headed for legal or ethical trouble (PVC 1, 2, 6; Assessment Tool #1, 5);
- Appreciate how developing events, issues, controversies and court decisions in media law and ethics can affect the professional mass communicator (PVC 1, 2, 6; Assessment Tool #2, 3, 4);
- Develop one’s own system of ethics as applied to mass communication (PVC 3, 4, 6, 7; Assessment Tool #1, 3, 4);
- Discuss the convergence and conflict between ethics and law (discussion board, written assignments, examinations). (PVC 1, 4, 6, 7; Assessment Tool #1, 3, 4, 5)

### **Assessment Tools, Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:**

1. Participation, attendance, homework, quizzes	50 points
2. Ethical case studies (10 each)	20 points
3. Brief I	15 points
4. Brief II	15 points
5. Position Paper	40 points
6. Midterm Examination	100 points
7. Final examination	100 points
Total possible points:	340 points

### **Assessment Tools:**

1) Participation/Attendance/Homework/Quizzes: (50 points) We will regularly have both class discussions and/or small-group discussions, in which you be expected to participate. Students are also required to participate weekly in the “Discussion Forum” on the class Black Board site. Each weekly DB forum will remain open for two weeks only.

Our classroom will be an open forum, but with respect and dignity. Disagreements about views and opinions – even with the instructor and guest speakers – are expected, but not personal attacks.

Homework assignments are due at the beginning of class on the designated due date. If the *entire* class regularly completes the homework assignments, there will be no in-class quizzes. But if not, expect quizzes regularly.

2) Ethical Case Studies: (20 points) In order to help develop ethical decision making skills, each student will submit two case analysis studies (worth ten points each)

applying ethical theories, principles and decision making tools to two different case studies in the Christians media ethics textbook. Assignments written about case studies analyzed in class discussions will not be accepted. Ethical cases studies are due on September 26 and November 14.

3, 4) Case Briefs: (Case Brief I 15 points and Case Brief II 15 points) Being able to succinctly brief court decisions is an essential tool for understanding case law and its application to real situations. Each student will be required to turn in case briefs to two selected cases. First, everyone will brief the landmark libel case *New York Times v. Sullivan*, due Monday, September 17, for in-class discussion. For the second brief (October 29), you may select a case from a provided list of mass communication law cases. Sample briefs and resource materials will be presented in class.

4) Position Paper: (40 points) With most of the issues involving mass communication law and ethics which we discuss, there will be at least two conflicting sides to the debate. In order to help students appreciate these conflicts involving free speech and mass media, you will select a controversial topic in mass communication ethics or law and write a 4-5 page position paper defending one side of the issue debate. Some suggested (not required) topics will be offered in class along with more detailed guidelines. A brief description of your position paper topic will be due at the midterm examination, October 15. The position paper will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, December 3.

6, 7) Examinations: (Midterm 100 points and Final 100 points) There will be two examinations: a midterm and a final. The midterm on Monday, October 15, will cover material from August 28 to October 10, including the textbook, lectures, discussions, readings, guest speakers and handouts. The final examination will cover material from October 17 to December 10. It will be to your advantage, however, to be able to apply principles and concepts from the *whole* course to questions posed on the final. Both examinations be worth 100 points each and consist of both essay and objective questions. For both exams, you should be prepared to apply the legal and ethical principles discussed to hypothetical situations.

Your final grade will be based on the percentage of the total points you earn:

A =	100%-90% =	340-306 points
B+ =	89%-86% =	305-292 points
B =	85%-80% =	291-272 points
C+ =	79%-76% =	271-258 points
C =	75%-70% =	257-238 points
D =	69%-65% =	237-221 points
F =	Below 65% =	Under 221 points

These figures are subject to revision depending on the number of homework assignments given during the semester.

## **Diversity Component**

All courses taught in the Department of Mass Communication at Iona College contain a module integrated into the course that explores the issue of the diversity of groups in relation to the mass communication industry. MCO 300 examines the diversity of ethical and legal perspectives, especially those voiced by minority groups, in mass communication, social justice and First Amendment issues.

## **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:**

**Iona College Policy:** Is the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author/person and the representation of them as one's own original work. Iona College policy stipulates that students may be failed for the assignment or course, with no option for resubmission or re-grading of said assignment. A second instance of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the College.

**Professor Policy:** There are several on-line services featuring case briefs of major law cases. While you may use these services and other sources as reference tools, do not copy these briefs verbatim and submit as your own work. Submission of work created by another (e.g. previous or current student in this class), including material rewritten or lifted verbatim from Internet or other sources, will be considered plagiarism. Position papers, case studies and case briefs will be submitted to the professor on Turnitin via Blackboard "Assignments." Cheating or plagiarism will result in automatic course failure and will be reported to the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Please don't cheat – it's not worth it!

## **General Course Policies:**

**Attendance:** Iona College's Department of Mass Communication advocates a professional discipline that will prepare students for careers in mass communication. Prompt attendance is required for all scheduled classes. In the event of an emergency, three absences will be allowed without penalty. After that, the student's final point total will drop five points for each additional absence. In this course, every three late arrivals will count as one absence. According to Iona College policy, a student who misses 20 percent or more of the scheduled classes (six classes for this course) will receive an FA grade.

Examination material will come from class lectures, discussions, readings, videos and guest speakers, much of which is not included in the textbook. Part of your grade comes from in-class quizzes, group discussions and case studies. Please let the professor know if you cannot attend a class session or need to make up an in-class assignment that week, not at the end of the semester. Makeup quizzes and homework must be submitted within one week of the day that a student returns to class. As stated above, excessive absenteeism without a legitimate excuse will reflect poorly on your final grade.

**General Guidelines for Written Assignments:** In consideration of the expectation that college students, particularly mass communication majors, possess

adequate writing skills, up to five points per assignment will be deducted for consistent mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar and editing (e.g. typos). Hint: don't rely solely on spell check – proof read carefully! Students must complete all written assignments and examinations in order to pass the course. Mere submission, however, does not guarantee a passing grade. All written assignments, except homework, must be submitted to Turnitin.com. Wikipedia.com will not be accepted as a cited source.

Written assignments, including homework, will be due at the beginning of class on the designated date. Ten percent of the total points possible will be deducted for each class day late. Late work will not be accepted after two weeks following the due date.

**Extra Credit:** Students may submit one extra legal case brief by the day of the final examination for a maximum of 10 points. You may brief any First Amendment free speech or free press case, such as those listed in the textbook case index. *You may not submit a case from the assigned list for the second case brief.* As with all written assignments, this extra credit opportunity must be also be submitted to Turnitin via Blackboard “Assignments” by the final examination.

**Class Conduct:** Please turn all cell phones and pagers to the vibrate mode upon entering the classroom. Please refrain from text messaging and private conversations during class since such conduct distracts your classmates and the professor. Sleeping and other disruptive or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and students involved will be asked to leave the classroom. To repeat: use of laptop computers, cell phones and text messengers are not permitted during class.

**Course and Teacher Evaluation (CTE):** Iona College now uses an on-line CTE system. This system is administered by an outside company and all of the data is collected confidentially. No student name or information will be linked to any feedback received by the instructor. The information collected will be compiled in aggregate form by the agency and distributed back to the Iona administration and faculty, with select information made available to students who complete the CTE. Your feedback in this process is an essential part of improving our course offerings and instructional effectiveness. We want and value your point of view.

### **Course Outline:**

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| Week One:   | Course introduction: definitions and sources of law and ethics.<br>Five freedoms of the First Amendment.<br>Readings: Middleton, Ch 2, Appendices A and B.               |
| Week Two:   | First Amendment theories, rights and applications. Legal system.<br>Readings: Middleton, Ch. 1.<br>Fundamental ethical philosophies. Readings: Christians, Introduction. |
| Week Three: | Prior Restraint and Free Speech. Readings: Middleton, Ch. 3.<br>Applied Ethical Models. Readings: Christians, Introduction.  |

Week Four: Libel. Readings: Middleton, Ch. 4.  
Ethical concerns: truth, deception, accuracy, fairness.  
Readings: Christians, Ch. 2.

**Brief #1 due on Monday, September 17.**

Week Five: Privacy: Legal and Ethical Concerns.  
Readings: Middleton, Ch. 5; Christians, Ch. 5.

**Ethics Case Study #1 due Wednesday, September 26.**

Week Six: Obscenity and Indecency; Readings: Middleton, Ch. 9 and handouts. Offensive and Hate Speech, Readings: Handouts.

Week Seven: Corporate and Commercial Speech. Readings: Middleton, Ch. 8.  
Ethics in Advertising and Public Relations.  
Readings: Christians, Parts 2, 3

**Mon. Oct. 15: Midterm Examination.  
Position Paper Topic due.**

Week Eight: Press Access, Free Press/Fair Trial; Readings:  
Middleton, Ch. 10.

Week Nine: Journalists' Privilege, Confidentiality, Newsgathering Torts,  
Access to Places and Information.  
Readings: Middleton, Ch. 11, 12.  
Ethical Concerns in Reporting (Print and Photojournalism);  
Readings: Christians, Ch 3.

Week Ten: Broadcast and Cable Regulation: Readings: Middleton, selected  
(see index for "Broadcasting" and "Cable Television").  
Ethical Concerns in Electronic Journalism.  
Readings: Selected cases.

**Brief #2 due on Monday, October 29.**

Week Eleven: Anti-Trust, Ownership; Concerns for Free-Lance Journalists;  
Student Press Rights. Readings: handouts.  
Corporate Ethics. Readings: Christians, Ch. 1, 15.

Week Twelve: New Media and the Internet. Readings: Middleton, selected  
sections (see index for "Internet"). A Code of Ethics for the  
Internet?

**Ethics Case Study #2 due Wednesday, November 14.**

Week Thirteen: Intellectual Property and Copyright.  
Readings: Middleton, Ch. 6.

Week Fourteen: Law: current legal concerns.  
Ethics: selected case studies.

**Position Paper due on Monday, December 3.**

Week Fifteen: Ethical considerations in diversity and social justice.  
Readings: Christians, Ch. 4 and handouts.

**Final Examination: TBD.**