Course Number: CMM380 (01)
Course Name: Media Ethics
Credits: 3 credits
Prerequisite: Sophomore Class Standing
Semester and Year: Spring 2015

Class: Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:45 / AC263
Faculty: Mark E. LaPointe, MA
          Email: mlapoint@endicott.edu
          Office hours by appointment

Catalog Description:
An overview of modern communications law, policy and regulation and the ethical conflicts faced in contemporary society by professional communicators. The course will consider the traditional and contemporary problems of expression and dissemination including issues inherent in the special considerations presented by the new media and information technologies. Satisfies the Social Science core requirement.

Course Objectives:
At the completion of this course the student should be able to:

1. Differentiate among key ethicists and apply principles to contemporary media issues.
2. Appreciate the type and range of issues facing media practitioners and audiences.
3. Design and execute an ethical deliberative model.
4. Perform case studies applying basic ethical and legal analysis.
5. Construct written and oral arguments defending particular ethical choices;
6. Articulate and apply ethical and legal principles in their own work at Endicott and beyond.

Topical Outline:

1. Relationship and distinctions among ethics, law, morality and policy.
2. Historic and contemporary ethical philosophy
3. Applied Ethics
4. Codes of Ethics guiding professional behavior
5. Deliberative model-making
6. Case Study: Privacy and Politics
7. Case Study: Media Ownership
8. Case Study: Obscenity
9. New Media, New Concerns
10. History and context of legal issues impacting media
11. Contemporary media policy – regulation and voluntary practice
12. Legal Case Study & Review

Teaching/Learning Strategies:

- readings
- group work
- in-class discussion, lecture and exercises
- oral presentations
- written assignments
- case studies and film analysis
- discussion and debate
- examinations

Evaluation Methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Philosopher</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
<td>February 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Postings (3 @ 5%)</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>February 20th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
<td>March 12th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Study Paper</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>March 27th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics for Bloggers (Group)</td>
<td>10/5 percent</td>
<td>April 10th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
<td>April 23rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Presentation (Group)</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation, Homework, Class Work</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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TOTAL: 100 percent

Attendance Policy:

Class attendance is very important to understanding the materials you need to master social science research skills. You will be dropped from the class after two un-excused absences. Unless there is a life-threatening emergency, absences will only be excused before the fact. Please come and talk to me about planned absences.

ADA Policy:

If you as a student, qualify as a person with a disability as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), you are strongly encouraged to register with the Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center for
Teaching and Learning is located in the Diane M. Halle Library room 201 and online at www.endicott.edu/academicresources.

Once registered with the Center for Teaching and Learning, it is your responsibility to present your accommodation letter to your instructor at the beginning of each semester.

**Academic Honesty:**

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy of Endicott College.

**Required Readings:**


Several journal articles from our library’s databases and some online resources will also be required, including, but not limited to:


Additional online readings and websites may be assigned throughout the semester.

**Course Calendar:**

**Note:** All readings for the week should be completed before the Tuesday class.

**Week One – January 27th and 29th**

**TOPIC:** Overview & Syllabus; Discussion of Ethics, Law, Policy and Morality

**Reading (for Thursday):** Syllabus. Chapter 1 in Plaisance

**NOTE:** Philosophers Assigned for First Assignment

**Week Two - February 3rd and 5th**

**TOPIC:** Virtue, Duty & Consequences

**Reading:** Chapter 2 in Plaisance

**Week Three – February 10th and 12th**

**TOPIC:** Applied Ethics in Media

**Reading:** Chapter 3 in Plaisance, SPJ Code of Ethics (online)

**DUE:** *My Philosopher* – **Friday, February 13th**
Week Four – February 17th and 19th  
**TOPIC:** Public Sentiment and Media Ethics  
**Reading:** “Between the Summits…” by Cooper  
**DUE:** Blog entry #1 – **Friday, February 20th**

Week Five – February 24th and 27th  
**TOPIC:** Technology  
**Reading:** Chapter 4 in Plaisance  
**NOTE:** No class meeting on 2/24 – Focus Day

Week Six – March 3rd and 5th  
**TOPIC:** Trust and Transparency  
**Reading:** Chapter 5 in Plaisance  
**DUE:** Blog Post #2, by **Friday, March 6th**

Week Seven – March 10th and 12th  
**TOPIC:** Fairness and Justice  
**Reading:** Chapter 6 in Plaisance  
**DUE:** Exam #1, In Class, **Thursday, March 12th**

Week Eight – NO CLASSES / SPRING BREAK

Week Nine – March 24th and 26th  
**TOPIC:** Obscenity  
**Reading:** “Obscenity and the World Wide Web” by Fee  
**DUE:** Case Study paper, **Friday, March 27th** (electronic submission)  
**NOTE:** No class meeting on 3/26 – MLP Away

Week Ten – March 31st and April 2nd  
**TOPIC:** Harm / Independence  
**Reading:** Chapters 7 & 8 in Plaisance

Week Eleven – April 7th and 9th  
**TOPIC:** Privacy and Politics  
**Reading:** Chapter 9 in Plaisance, and “What kind of media and when?” by Wojdynski & Riffe  
**DUE:** Code of Ethics for Bloggers Blog, **Friday, April 10th**

Week Twelve – April 14th and 16th  
**TOPIC:** Blog Presentations  
**NO Reading**

Week Thirteen – April 21st and 23rd  
**TOPIC:** Media Ownership & the Public Trust  
**Reading:** “Two principles of broadcast media…” by Buckley and FAIR (online)  
**DUE:** Exam #2, in class on **Thursday, April 23rd**
Week Fourteen – April 28th and 30th
TOPIC: Community & Implications
Reading: Chapters 10 & 11 in Plaisance
DUE: Blog Entry #3 by Tuesday, May 4th
NOTE: Last class meeting on April 30th

Final Exam/Presentation: TBD
(There will be no exams given in advance. Make travel plans with this in mind!)

Assignments:

Reading assignments listed in the syllabus must be completed by the first class of that week. It is important for you to do the readings to be able to understand the materials covered in class as well as participate in discussion. If you have not read the materials you may be asked to leave the class for the day; this will count as an unexcused absence.

My Philosopher

Overview: This assignment is designed to introduce you more fully to a particular ethicist and his/her guiding philosophy. Although you are expected to be familiar with the various philosophers discussed in class and through the readings, this paper focuses on a single person and the work he or she has contributed to the field of Ethics.

Directions: You will be assigned a philosopher during the second class meeting. Your job is to become an expert on this person and to explain, in writing, who he/she was (is) and what he/she contributed to our understanding of ethics, particularly in communication/media contexts. You must complete this by February 13th.

You will create a posting on the class blog for this assignment. Your posting will…

1. Be about 500-750 words, well-written and properly cited. You should use hyperlinks as appropriate, particularly to other students’ postings on our blog.
2. Draw upon three academic sources (one of which may be the course text). You may use one webpage as a source IF you can identify the author and assess his/her credibility (i.e. is she a professor of ethics at a university?). Cite sources using proper APA style.
3. Be tagged with proper key terms and include your name as author both at the top of your post, and at the end with a hashtag (i.e. #lapointe)

Your posting should include several elements, each with a proper heading:

1. A photo or image of the philosopher, properly cited.
2. A brief biography or personal history of the person in a way that underscores his/her own expertise and authority. Where did they come from? Who influenced them? What was the climate in which
they were creating philosophy? How were they received by the society around them?

3. An explanation of their contribution to ethics. What did they design, author or adapt? Did they create a named theory that others have followed? Did they create an ethical model (you may wish to include a diagram if so).

4. An illustration or explanation of how they might be useful to someone studying or practicing media ethics. You might cite a particular case as an example, or provide a hypothetical argument for their use.

5. Links, hashtags and other elements that take advantage of the medium as is appropriate. This will vary from student to student, but may even include links to other students’ posts when philosophers are connected.

Blog Entries

Overview: You will be writing three blog entries of approximately 500 words during the semester. These entries will be posted on the course blog and should be written clearly and professionally and have proper citation as appropriate. The first blog entry is due February 20th. You may do the other blog entries in whatever order you prefer, provided one is posted before March 6th and the other before May 4th.

Blog #1 – Taking Stock. First, read the article by Cooper (citation above) and make notes about how Americans view media ethics. Then, seek a contemporary ethical issue where some aspect of media or communications is implicated (i.e. Guardian wire-tapping story). Then, using the issue you’ve found and the key points you’ve pulled from Cooper, conduct a series of at least 5 casual interviews to gauge how people feel about media ethics, generally, and the case at hand more particularly. Try not to lead the people you’re interviewing, but rather encourage them to open up about their own opinions and feelings. Finally, take the three elements (Cooper, case study, interviews) and write your own synthesized take on how people perceive media ethics. Be sure to use examples from each element within your posting and cite sources (and use hyperlinks) as appropriate.

Blog #2 – Ethics goes to the movies. You will select a film from the list provided on Canvas. These films all focus on media ethics through a popular, fictional lens. You can find a synopsis of each film on www.imdb.com to help you choose. Then, watch the film on your own and write a 300-500 word critical review of the film with particular attention paid to ethical issue(s) raised within the movie. Do not summarize the film – instead, focus on the issues raised by the film (you may cite examples from the film). Be concise and exercise care in your writing. Cite each film in APA format at the top of your posting.

Blog #3 – Case In Point. For this posting, you are to draw inspiration from one of the many “case in point” segments found in the Plaisance text and write your own reflection on the issue(s) raised. You can use this as an opportunity to speak from your own perspective on an issue important to you, but remember to support your points with example, evidence and other, expert resources. Although this is first person, I still expect a strong quality of writing here. BONUS: You can earn some extra credit by
responding to two classmates’ “case in point” posts. Your responses must be substantive (go beyond, “nice post!”) to earn credit.

**Exams** – There are two in-class examinations in this course. Each is weighted equally and will cover roughly half of the materially in class. Exams are primarily multiple choice and short answer and we will go over expectations in advance. Students who are eligible for extra time should make arrangements in advance.

**Case Study**

**Overview:** The case study serves as a culminating paper for each student. Here you will apply readings, lectures and course discussion to a specific, contemporary incident that you’ve identified. **The incident in question must involve media (content, industry, or audience), a specific and identifiable issue or event, and an ethical and legal framework through which to examine the issue.**

**Directions:** Give careful consideration to the topic. You will want a broad topic (i.e. cyber bullying) that intersects with a specific example (i.e. Megan Meier’s 2007 suicide). You will need to check with me in advance regarding your chosen topic. Your paper will:

1. **Discuss the history and context of the broad topic.** What are some of the key moments, trends, developments of this topic. Who are key players and figures? What is the societal framework in which the topic emerged?
2. **Take us to the specific situation and discuss the details of that moment as well.** What happened? Was it a singular event or a series of events? What were/are the outcomes?
3. **Discuss the ethical and legal aspects of the topic.** Have there been any legislative changes or discussions? What are the ethical implications at hand?
4. **Complete your case study by looking forward to the future of this topic.** Will the specific event change anything? What might we see enhanced or reduced in the future?
5. **Include a minimum of four (4) sources, two (2) of which must be academic,** for your case study. If your case study involves a particular program, ad, article, etc., include that media text as an additional source. Remember, your goal here isn’t to argue a particular position, but to analyze and display the case at hand. You may use the text as one of your sources.
6. **Write approximately 5 pages and use proper APA format.** Include page numbers and a cover page on your paper. Submit your paper electronically.

**Bloggers Code of Ethics (Group Project)**

**Overview:** Internet bloggers and commentators constitute an increasingly important voice in journalism, but these mostly independent commentators have been unable to agree on a code of ethics governing how they should report on news events. Imagine that you have the opportunity to help construct such a code.
**Review** the four codes of ethics in the appendices of Jacquette’s *Journalistic Ethics* as a blueprint. You will be provided this as a digital handout in advance.

**Decide** which of the principles contained in these four codes would apply to bloggers, and how. Perhaps there are ethical considerations inherent in blogging that are not covered in any of the four codes—in which case you will have to create new guidelines to fit those circumstances. You should look for examples and arguments from outside sources as well as using discussion and debate within your group.

**Create** a code of ethics based on your research. Remember to cite your sources.

**Submit** your code of ethics in the class blog. Each of the principles you select should be accompanied by description and explanation. You may also provide an example (or two) of how your Code of Ethics would be applied in a particular case or situation.

**Present** your Code of Ethics to class orally. Be prepared to respond to questions and provide examples to help the class understand your group’s thinking.

**Group Presentation / Final Project**

**Overview:** Your final group project and presentation is an opportunity for you to investigate and report on a particular problematic area within media/communication that illustrates the complexity of applied ethics and law. Your project will engage with the broad implications of ethics in practice (for example, issues related to intellectual property in film), while providing specific evidence and case example to illustrate your point (record companies taking a hard line on file-sharing, for example). Your presentation should, obviously, have a conclusion, but your goal is not necessarily to present an answer to an ethical and/or legal debate. Instead, focus on things such as history, impact, discourse, etc. that help to display the complicated nature of ethics in media. If you’ve raised the level of understanding and have contributed to sophisticated debate, you’ve done your job.

**Directions:** Before you even begin, give careful consideration to the topic, both broadly, and through specific lenses.

To succeed in this project, your group will present the class with a critical examination (explanation, description and analysis) of an issue related to ethics in media. Your project/presentation will:

- Clearly engage with both philosophy and example. What are you trying to show through your examination of this situation? Why is it important, and what do we learn from your analysis and investigation?
- Culminate in a 10-minute presentation to the class that utilizes good presentation skills and is creative, thoughtful and intellectually engaging. Each member of the team must speak at some time during the presentation. The form of presentation is up to you (Powerpoint, film, puppet show, etc...)
- Provide your classmates with a 1-page handout that adds to your presentation, or illuminates a particular aspect of it.
- Utilizes no fewer than 3 scholarly sources (in addition to the two course books), and no fewer than 2 popular sources (which may include media). Your group will turn in a properly-formatted bibliography on the day of your presentation.
The final grading of this project will depend upon how well you've achieved the above and how well you've articulated the connection between the philosophy at hand and the issue. Each team member will be evaluated as an individual based upon the presentation and a peer/self evaluation.

All teams should connect with me no later than April 24th to discuss the project’s focus. Teams will be assigned during week 2.

**Class Participation / Group Work**

You are expected to participate in this class in a regular and substantive manner. Classes will regularly involve discussion and debate, often utilizing small group work. Students must come to class having completed the readings and prepared to discuss them in detail. Groups will be asked regularly to present briefly on a scenario or on that week’s readings. There will be occasional homework asking students to seek out contemporary issues involving media ethics or law.

Substantive participant involves being present and making a contribution to each class meeting. Students with several absences will see their participation score impacted significantly.

This class will require use of both a class blog and of Canvas. We will go over both of these in class. All course materials and grades will be accessible on Canvas.

**Rules of the Road**

- Email yourself drafts of all your work in order to avoid losing your writings due to computer problems.

- **It is expected that you have a copy of all assigned reading with you in class.**

- It is crucially important that you do the required readings. A variety of exercises will occupy class time. You will be unable to do the exercises if you haven’t done the readings. Coming to class unprepared will impact your final grade- this is aside from the class participation component of your grade. I reserve the right (and will) lower your final grade if you come to class unprepared.

- Unless noted, all written work should be in the third person.

- A grade of “C” on any of your work is considered to be average. If you get above a C then you are doing good-to-excellent work. A grade below a “C” means that you are performing below expectations.

- Following School of Communication policy, it is unacceptable to use work created for one course in another course. You will receive a failing grade on any project/paper that resembles a project/paper you did for another class at Endicott. Please contact me with any questions around this policy!
• All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically, or uploaded to the course blog, unless otherwise indicated.

• Your spelling, grammar, language syntax, and organization must reflect standard written English protocols. It is crucial that you begin, at this point in your professional development, to craft your writing according to accepted norms. Refer to *A Writer's Reference* if you have any questions around style issues. Papers that contain multiple errors will automatically receive a grade of C or lower, despite the quality of work and content. I suggest that you take your written assignments to the writing center and go over your work with any of the qualified tutors. No matter how great your writing skills, there will always be room for improvement!

• In addition to using good grammar and appropriate punctuation in your written assignments, I also ask that your email to me reflect standard written English. I find more and more that students tend to ignore rules of capitalization and punctuation in their email correspondence—misspellings are too common. Always include a relevant subject line. Once you enter the work-world, for the most part, the expectation will be that your emails are written using professional technique; you can begin practicing this style in our correspondence.

• Be warned that your friends may not necessarily be writing experts. Having them read over your work may be beneficial in many ways but should not suffice as a complete critique prior to your handing in your assignment!

• I am available to review drafts of every single piece of work you turn in during the semester. It is highly recommended that you take advantage of this offer.

• All sources must be cited using APA guidelines. Any ideas that are not original—that come from readings, the web or even speeches you may hear on television *must be cited!* Plagiarism will result in a final failing grade. Retain your notes for any of the work you do in this class. If there is a question of plagiarism, you will be required to provide evidence that the work is indeed your own.

• If you plan to cite web pages you must download them and attach them to your written assignment. NOTE: you must also cite your sources in your reference sheet!

• No late work will be accepted. Since most of our work is submitted electronically, an absence from campus will not be an acceptable excuse for not getting work in on time.

• All students must participate in the final exam session. **Travel plans to get home are not considered an excuse.**

• I consider tardiness to be disrespectful both to the instructor and your fellow classmates. If there is a good reason why you cannot make it to class on time, please discuss it with me “off-line”.
• Part of your final grade will reflect your ability to act like a professional in the classroom setting. This means not only will you listen respectfully in class with no side discussions, but that your level of participation is in keeping with that of a communication professional.

• Generally, I do not allow the use of laptops in class; in the case of this course, I believe laptops distract from the class as opposed to adding value. I will indicate for which class sessions you may bring your laptop.

This syllabus is subject to change.

Violations of Academic Integrity Standards

From the Student Handbook

The value of an Endicott degree is directly affected by the integrity that students have in completing assignments and examinations for course requirements. Violations of these academic standards are serious offenses and degrade the value of an Endicott College education. If a student is suspected of violating any standard of academic integrity, the following steps will be taken:

1. The faculty member will notify in writing the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College of the violation.

2. The faculty member will notify the Chair/Dean of the school where the violations took place.

3. The faculty member will notify the Chair/Dean of the student’s academic program about the violation and its incurred disciplinary action.

For a first violation, the faculty member will determine the consequence. Students may appeal faculty decisions in writing to the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College. Appeals will be heard by the Academic Honesty Standards Committee. The Committee’s decision will be forwarded to the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College. Students may appeal the Committee’s decision to the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College.

For subsequent violations, the faculty member will take the steps listed above. The faculty member will also decide the first consequence. In addition, the Academic Honesty Standards Committee will make a recommendation for a second disciplinary action to the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College. Disciplinary actions for subsequent violations are final.

A student who commits multiple academic integrity violations is subject to dismissal from the college. All decisions of the Endicott College Academic Honesty Standards Committee are subject to the approval of the Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate College and the Endicott President.