

Loyola University Chicago
COMM 215-203 Ethics and Communication
Spring 2014
Thu/4:15-6:45 p.m.
Corboy Law Center, Room 303

Michael Limón, instructor
Office hours generally two hours before/after class, or by appt.
Phone: (801) 580-0629
Email: mlimon@luc.edu

You go to a [dermatology clinic](#) and buy about \$100 worth of [skin products](#). The receptionist writes down the order, and takes your credit card number. She says she'll "run the number through later, when the computer is up," but she doesn't want you to leave without the products, and gives them to you, along with a handful of samples. The next day, you receive a package in the mail with the same order you had taken home. Do you keep the stuff and let the error go, or do you call so you can take it back?

Course Description and Expected Outcomes

Ethics represents the choices we make when no one is watching. It represents both what we do and what we don't do. This course will make you aware of ethics, especially as it relates to personal communication (what you say and don't say, your privacy, pressures/choices you may face to lie and deceive) and professional communication, as in advertising, public relations, and journalism. It will familiarize students with underlying ethical values that guide communication processes.

The successful student will develop a critical appreciation of what goes into ethical decision-making, the tough calls that the media and other industries are often forced to make, and the ethical lapses that also abound. You should further develop your own ethical compass as a result of this course. This course will present an "ethical toolbox" for students: a set of principles, philosophies, ethical decision making tools and relevant questions that you'll be able to apply in certain dilemmas that will arise throughout your lives. This class not only seeks to prepare future media professionals, but also tries to increase media literacy and critical awareness with students who might not pursue a career in media and to help you make ethical choices in your own communications.

Required Course Materials

- [Media Ethics: Issues and Cases](#), 8th edition, by Phillip Patterson and Lee Wilkins
- The New York Times – read daily (a digital edition subscription is available for about \$16 per month, but you can access it for free through the Loyola libraries)

Our Projected Path

After some preliminary exploration of ethical philosophies and systems, the class will focus on cases studies, most drawn from real life, in which individuals and organizations confront situations requiring ethical discernment and decision making. We will learn how to recognize ethical dilemmas, identify the problems and the various interests involved, analyze them systematically, and arrive at conclusions that give due respect to all involved—including the community at large and the needs of a democratically governed people for information on which to base their decisions as citizens. Most of the cases will be drawn from the textbook, Media Ethics: Issues and Cases. Others will arise from the news, for rarely does a week go by without some issue of occupational ethics surfacing and creating controversy.

Readings listed for a particular date are to have been completed by that date and students are expected to be prepared to discuss them in class.

The importance of active class participation, cannot be underemphasized because there will be a class participation component of your final grade. Especially in journalism, talking openly about ethical questions in the newsroom is essential to the processes of discernment and reasoning. Quite literally, the conversation's the thing.

Each student will be required to maintain an “ethics diary,” which will be a component of his/her final grade. Each student also will be required, along with other members of a team, to investigate and present to the class a case selected by me from the textbook. Additionally, each student will be required to submit a research paper on one of a list of cases that I will select.

Grading

Five components will go into your final grade: the ethics diary (four parts), class participation, case presentation, personal blog and a research paper for the final exam. Each component will be worth 200 points, for a total of 1000. Final grades will be determined as follows:

930 – 1000 points = A
900 – 929 points = A-
870 – 899 points = B+
830 – 869 points = B
800 – 829 points = B-
770 – 799 points = C+
730 – 769 points = C
700 – 729 points = C-
670 – 699 points = D+
630 – 669 points = D
600 – 629 points = D-
below 600 points = F

Ethics Diary

This assignment has three purposes:

- To cause you to read the newspaper
- To foster discernment of moral/ethical dilemmas
- To develop moral imagination

You must identify one story each week from The New York Times that involves an ethical dilemma. Every other Tuesday you will be expected to turn in your diary entries for the two prior weeks, and these will be graded. The two entries together should consume no more than one page, single-spaced. Each diary entry must: 1) identify the story by headline and date, 2) give a brief (no more than five lines) summary of the story, 3) describe the ethical dilemma presented in the story in terms of ethical duties or principles in conflict or in tension.

Remember: This is a journalism class, so these diary entries must be written in full sentences, using proper grammar, punctuation and spelling. An example of a diary entry will be available on the Sakai site for this course.

Group Presentations

On the last page of this syllabus you will find a list of nine groups, all but the last comprising four members of the class. Each group has been assigned a chapter of the textbook from which I will select a case for the members to present to the rest of the class. The case may be one of those contained in the actual textbook or it may come from the list of additional “Cases on the Web” which follows the essay that introduces each chapter.

Working as a team, each group must develop a presentation of its assigned case, following the steps in the method that we as a class will have devised. Each member of the group must have a speaking part in the presentation. Group members must be prepared to take questions and defend their analysis and decisionmaking to other members of the class. Grading will be based on the accuracy, thoroughness and imagination of your presentation, on evidence of your grasp of subtle concepts and distinctions, and on the vigor and intellectual nimbleness with which you lead the class in discussion or debate.

At the class session immediately preceding the one at which a group is to present, the group must give me an outline of its planned presentation. This outline should be no more than two pages long (double-spaced, standard margins). The outline should indicate which parts of the presentation each member of the group will make and what each member’s principal points of emphasis will be.

Class Participation

As already mentioned, in journalism ethics, the conversation’s the thing. For that reason, it is essential that you be in class, be attentive and participate actively. That means asking questions, proposing answers, challenging, encouraging, discussing.

Let me emphasize: The class participation component of your grade is NOT an extra-credit thing. It is an essential part of the course. It will be impossible to earn an A in this course unless you participate actively.

Here is the grading scale for class participation (thanks to my colleague, Professor Bastiaan Vanacker, for this scale):

A = Frequent and meaningful contributions to class discussion that show insight and understanding of material

B = Frequent and meaningful contribution to class discussion

C = Occasional participation in class discussion

D = Participates only when called upon

F = No participation

Personal blog

Research Paper/Finals Project

By Feb. 27 I will distribute a list of four or five cases or topics. Each student must select one and do an analytical paper on the case. This paper should:

- summarize the important facts
- identify the key ethical problems or dilemmas for the media actors involved
- evaluate how those involved handled these problems
- suggest what ethical lessons can be derived from the case for the guidance of others

You will need to do research on the case to determine the facts and the ultimate outcome and to critically examine how it was handled. Up to one letter grade of extra credit will go to anyone who interviews, either in person or by telephone, an important participant in his/her selected case.

These papers should run four to five pages in length (double-spaced, standard margins, 12-point type). They should be completed and turned in by our last class session on Thursday, April 24.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism is a violation of Loyola University policy and of the very idea of a university as a community of scholars engaged in the discovery and teaching of knowledge. Additionally, it is the cardinal sin of journalism, a firing offense at most news organizations.

There is a very simple way to avoid plagiarism: If you are using the words or ideas of another, say so. Attribute them. Let the reader or listener know whose words or ideas they really are.

There is no shame in this. (See my attribution to Professor Vanacker above, for example.)

Anyone discovered plagiarizing will, on the first offense, receive an F for the assignment and be reported to the dean of the School of Communication for possible additional sanctions. If there is a second offense, the student will receive an F for the course and be reported to the dean and to other appropriate university authorities.

Students with disabilities

Any student with a learning disability that requires special accommodation during classes or exams must present documentation from the appropriate University authorities. Please do this

early in the semester, rather than waiting until later when your grade situation may have become dire. I cannot retroactively adjust grades in cases where documentation was presented late.

Classroom behavior

- Please be on time for class. If you must leave class early, please inform me before class begins.
- Silence your cell phones and do not make calls, read or respond to e-mails or text messages during class.
- Please treat others during class discussions with the respect you would wish to receive.
- Focus on the business of the class while it is in session, not on browsing the Internet, playing computer games or engaging in other distractions.
- Do not have deliveries of any kind made to the classroom while we are in session.

Submitting Assignments

All assignments for this course are to be typewritten in MS Word and submitted on paper on the assigned day. Ethics diaries should be single-spaced and both entries should not exceed a single page. Research papers must be double-spaced and use 12-point type and standard margins.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1, Thursday, Jan. 16

- Introductions
- Review of the syllabus; overview of the course
- Reading: Chapter 1, “An Introduction to Ethical Decision Making”
- Reading: Pages 99-103: The Potter Box
- Reading: Pages 134-135: John Rawls’ Veil of Ignorance

Week 2, Thursday, Jan. 23

- Reading: The Associated Press Statement of News Values and Principles and the codes of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists and NPR (all available on the websites of these organizations)
- Reading: Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics (available on the PRSA website)
- Devising our own process of ethical decisionmaking
- How to do the ethics diary

Week 3, Jan. 30

- Reading: Chapter 2, “Information Ethics: A Profession Seeks the Truth”
- Film: “Absence of Malice”

Week 4, Feb. 6

- Film: “Absence of Malice”
- Discussion of ethical themes in the film
- Group #1: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 2)

- Group #1: presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 2

Week 5, Feb. 13

- First Ethics Diary due (for weeks of Sept. 8-14 and 15-21)
- Reading: Chapter 4: “Loyalty: Choosing Between Competing Allegiances”
- Group #2: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 4)
- Group #2: presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 4

Week 6, Feb. 20

- Second Ethics Diary due (weeks of Sept. 16-22 and 23-29)
- Reading: Chapter 5: “Privacy: Looking for Solitude in the Global Village” BARTMAN
- Group #3: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 5)
- Group #3 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 5

Week 7, Feb. 27

- Second Ethics Diary due (for weeks of Sept. 22-28 and Sept. 29-Oct. 5)
- Research Paper topics to be distributed
- TBA

Week 8, March 6

Spring break, no class

Week 9, March 13

- Reading: Chapter 6: “Mass Media in a Democratic Society: Keeping a Promise”
- Group #4: presentation outline due (Case drawn from Chapter 6)
- Group #4: Presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 6

Week 10, March 20

- Reading: Chapter 7: “Media Economics: The Deadline Meets the Bottom Line”
- Group #5: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 7)
- Group #5 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 7

Week 11, March 27

- Third Ethics Diary due (weeks of Oct. 13-19 and 20-26)
- Reading: Chapter 8: “Picture This: The Ethics of Photo and Video Journalism” ROCKY
- Group #6: presentation outline (case drawn from Chapter 8)

- Group #6 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 8

Week 12, April 3

- Reading: Chapter 9: “New Media: Continuing Questions and New Roles”
- Group #7: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 9)
- Group #7 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 9

Week 13, April 10

- Fourth and final ethics diary due (weeks of Oct. 27-Nov. 2 and Nov. 3-9)
- Reading: Chapter 10: “The Ethical Dimensions of Art and Entertainment”
- Group #8: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 10)

Week 14, April 17

- Group #8 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 10
- Film: Frontline’s “The Persuaders”
- Finish “The Persuaders”
- Discussion of ethical issues raised by the film

Week 15, April 24

- Reading: Chapter 3: “Strategic Communication: Does Client Advocate Mean Consumer Adversary”
- Group #9: presentation outline due (case drawn from Chapter 3)
- Group #9 presentation
- Further discussion of Chapter 3
- Course Review and Study Guide for Final Exam

FINALS PROJECT: Due date, no later than 6:15 P.M., May 1, earlier if complete

PRESENTATION GROUPS:

- #1 – Asmus, Fillingim, Irizarry, Renteria
- #2 – Bissonette, Fisher, Lafreniere, Reyes
- #3 – Blachuta, Flaherty, Lee, Schoenkin
- #4 – Bowman, Fowke, Lim, Smith
- #5 – Burke, Graaff, Livinghouse, Truini
- #6 – Carrozza, Gray, Lodzinski, Tsoukatos

#7 – Cox, Haas, Nagle, Utzig

#8 – Currens, Hagner, Pion, Valenzuela

#9 – Fernandez, Hwang, Piri

Michael Limón is a veteran journalist/editor who has led and been part of award-winning teams at a wide range of top newspapers. Most recently, as business editor at *The Salt Lake Tribune*, the Money section under his supervision was honored with multiple General Excellence awards by the Society of American Business Editors and Writers (SABEW). Previous to that, during more than a decade with the Gannett Co., in roles ranging from assistant managing editor to executive editor, he was twice named a Gannett Newsroom Supervisor of the Year and was honored by The Associated Press, among others.

Limón began his career as a reporter at *The Wichita Eagle* before serving in a variety of editing positions at *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Sacramento Bee*. He is a lifetime member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, a site-team evaluator for the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), and serves on the Board of Visitors for the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma, his alma mater (BA journalism).

Limón and wife Robbin, who have two grown children, recently relocated to Chicago and live in the West Loop. He is an avid skier who enjoys live music of almost any genre and collects first-edition books.