

Undergraduate Course Outline

2016

Ethics in Public Relations



“ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS”



Professor/Instructor
Office Location
Phone
E-mail
Twitter
Office Hours
Class Hours
Course Web Site

COURSE OVERVIEW

“Ethics in Public Relations” is designed to provide an overview of ethical theories and principles that are useful for the development of a framework for ethical decision-making in the professional practice of public relations & corporate communications 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.

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...

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.

The instructor's role in this course is to be the Devil's Advocate.

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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of this course, 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.

- Adhere to the posted deadlines.

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.

REQUIRED READING

Parsons, Patricia J. (2016). *Ethics in public relations: A guide to best practice*. 3rd 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.

MARKING SCHEME

Assignment	Worth...	Date/Deadline
Midterm Examination	30%	
Personal Code of Ethics	40%	
Reflections on Ethics Insights	30%	

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

1 – REFLECTIONS ON ETHICS INSIGHTS

This is a very important assignment both to enhance your learning and 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.

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.

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.

- ❖ 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).
- ❖ 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.

❖ **Instructions for preparation of documents for submission:**

2- PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS

The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your own moral development that forms the basis for your ethical behaviour. You must put this reflection into words creating a personal code of ethics that reflects what you believe to be important (your values) and how these can find manifestation in action. The code assignment as you will submit it will consist of the following components:

- **A personal code** of conduct that emanates from your personal values. (Bullets are generally used for delineating the *individual tenets* of codes of ethics).
- **A professional code** that elucidates your values related to the requirements of your chosen discipline (bulleted again).
- **A brief explanatory paper** indicating the thought process in which you engaged to develop these codes. This narrative essay should explain how you came to develop these particular values as an individual and how you think about them now. (How did you get to be the person you are today?)

The narrative essay should be between 900-1100 words. Each of the bulleted codes should be between one and two pages.

The marks will not be based on whether or not the professor/instructor believes you to be ethical; rather it is based on the quality of the thought process and congruency between codes and your value system are keys.

3 - ESSAY /MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Each instructor teaching this course should determine if he or she prefers to assign a mid-term exam (sample questions available) or an essay.

Outline for Code Assignment

1- Introduction to the essay

2 -The personal code of ethics:

- Tenet
- Tenet
- Tenet etc...

3- The professional code of ethics

- Tenet
- Tenet
- Tenet etc...

4- The contextual essay

- How I came to be the kind of person I am today
- Aspects of my background that have led directly or indirectly to my values and the tenets as I have presented them.

5- Conclusion

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week #	Questions we'll answer	Class Topics	Required Reading
1	<p>What is this course about?</p> <p>What is expected of you?</p> <p>What is ethics?</p> <p>Why is ethics important in the practice of PR?</p>	<p>Introduction to the course and its objectives</p> <p>Introduction to ethics and moral reasoning</p> <p>What ethics is & is not</p>	Chapters 1, 3, 4 & 6
2	<p>What can we learn from the history of ethical thought?</p> <p>What philosophical approaches guide ethics in today's world?</p>	<p>History of ethical thought</p> <p>Ethics theories & basic moral principles</p> <p>The 'Pillars of Public Relations Ethics'</p>	Chapters 2, 5 & 6
3	<p>How does the power of public communication affect the importance of ethics in practice?</p> <p>How did the professional field of public relations come to be viewed with such skepticism?</p>	<p>The public relations hall of shame (ethical transgressions through the ages in the PR industry)</p> <p>Personal versus professional ethics</p> <p>What it means to be a professional</p> <p>Loyalties in PR</p> <p>Movie: <i>Wag the Dog</i></p>	Review Chapter 1
4	<p>What kind of moral individual are you?</p> <p>How did you get to be the kind of moral individual that you are today?</p> <p>Will you continue to develop morally?</p>	<p>Theory of moral development and its detractors</p>	Chapter 3 & 7
5	<p>Why isn't ethics just about obeying a series of rules? Wouldn't that be easier?</p>	<p>Codes of ethics: PRSA, CPRS, CIPR(UK), Global Alliance</p> <p>Minimums or ideals?</p>	Chapter 8

	Isn't a code of ethics in a professional discipline enough? Or are there other rules that we should follow?	Rule-based ethics versus situational ethics	
6	<p>What is a conflict of interest?</p> <p>What are common conflicts in the field of public relations?</p> <p>How can you avoid such conflicts and the perception of such conflicts?</p>	<p>Definition of a conflict of interest</p> <p>The importance of the perception of conflict</p> <p>Personal versus professional conflicts</p> <p>Personal relationships at work</p> <p>Whistle-blowing & Moonlighting</p>	<p>Review</p> <p>Chapter 4</p> <p>Chapters 9 & 10</p>
7	<p>What are our moral responsibilities in our relationships with traditional media such as journalists?</p> <p>What moral issues are of concern in a world of 24/7 news coverage?</p>	<p>Cultivating ethical media relationships</p> <p>The concept of media transparency</p> <p>Journalistic ethical standards</p>	Chapter 11
8	<p>How has the evolution of online media contributed to the ethical dilemmas in media communication?</p> <p>What are the ethical issues in using sponsored online material?</p> <p>How can PR practitioners contribute to the development of ethical organizational social media policies for internal publics?</p>	<p>The lag between technological advancement and ethical advancement</p> <p>Ethical use of sponsored online communication and native advertising</p> <p>Social media use and your internal public</p>	Chapter 12
9	<p>Propaganda, persuasion, advocacy, PR – aren't they all the same thing when it comes to ethics?</p> <p>Can our use of words in our messaging have ethical dilemmas?</p>	<p>The ethics of persuasion</p> <p>The ethical limits of advocacy</p> <p>Euphemism & PR doublespeak</p> <p>The ethics of vocabulary choice</p>	Chapter 13

10	How can PR strategists consider ethics as part of strategic planning?	Community relations, sponsorship and cause-related marketing Speechwriting Ghostwriting Plagiarism	Chapters 14 & 15
11	Does everyone really face ethical dilemmas every day? How can we figure out how to do the right thing?	Frameworks for making ethical decisions	Chapter 16
12	What is organizational social responsibility? Is there a role for public communicators in organizational ethics? How can PR practitioners be ready to deal with the as-yet-unknown future of ethics in public communication?	The role of public relations in the organizational social responsibility program The role of PR practitioners in the development of a culture of ethics How PR practitioners can remain current on ethical dilemmas and their solutions in the industry	Chapters 17 & 18