COMM 3355 Communication Ethics  
Fall 2016, Section 1 (Bayou 1313) M 4:00pm-6:50pm  
Dr. Brent Kice  
Office: Arbor 1307.17 Phone: 281-283-3482  
Office hours: M 12:00-2:00, TTh 10:00-12:00, or by appointment  
email: kice@uhcl.edu  
Department of Communication and Studio Arts  


Articles:  
Locke, John. Of the beginning of political societies; of the ends of political society and government; of the forms of a commonwealth.” The Second Treatise of Government.  

(3 credits) Examination of a range of ethical principles and case studies with the ultimate goal of helping students work out their own professional standards and commit to them.  

Applied Critical Thinking Statement: This course has been authorized by UHCL as an Applied Critical Thinking (ACT) Course which means that in addition to learning about the specified course content, students will be engaged with some or all of the Elements of Thought and Universal Intellectual Standards of critical thinking. The objective of an ACT course is to develop the student’s ability to become skilled at analysis and evaluation by applying a set of intellectual tools that may be effectively used across all disciplines (as well as to the student’s personal life). Based on the Foundation for Critical Thinking model (http://www.criticalthinking.org/), critical thinking involves thinking for a purpose, asking questions, using information, applying concepts, drawing inferences and conclusions, identifying assumptions, anticipating implications and consequences, and recognizing points of view. The Universal Intellectual Standards that are applied to these Elements of Thought of critical thinking in order to develop Intellectual Traits include clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness.  

Course Objectives:  
The design of this course is to provide students with a theoretical and practical base regarding students’ ethical responsibilities as communicators. By the conclusion of the course, students will 1) enhance their understandings of moral approaches regarding communication in order to develop their own moral codes and 2) study social concepts such as the Spectacle, the Public Sphere, Ideology, and the Social Contract as they relate to the development of their moral characters within society. Students will reach these goals through exams, case studies and a term paper. In turn, students will be able to 3) apply concepts of morality to issues of professional communication.  

Critical Thinking and Communication Ethics  
We will continue to face ethical dilemmas in our professional lives. The large impact of mass media places ethical decisions at high stakes because our decisions will not affect a small group of people, rather, they have the potential to affect thousands. In addition, we may feel pressured to base ethical decisions on the law even though we feel the decisions are not right. So, the ability to analyze a situation, develop a critically-based rationale for how to respond, and then communicate that response to coworkers, clients, and the public is a necessity for an effective communicator. Critical thinking is the foundation for developing and communicating responses to applied ethics. Developing our critical thinking skills prepares us to address the unique ethical dilemmas we surely will face in our professional lives.  

Student Learning Objectives for Critical Thinking  
1) Develop a clear understanding of moral reasoning theories and concepts.  
2) Investigate the breadth and depth of points of views regarding ethical scenarios.  
3) Interpret the significance of gathered information and how to apply it to develop an ethical solution.  
4) Precisely communicate implications and resolutions to potential stakeholders.
Grading:
150 pts. Ethics Exam 1
175 pts. Ethics Exam 2
175 pts. Ethics Exam 3
150 pts. Moral Reasoning Position Paper
250 pts. Case Study Paper
100 pts. Participation
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1000 pts. Total

Ethics Exams
Students will take three Ethics Exams to assess their understanding and application of course material. In particular, the exams will assess Student Learning Objectives for Critical Thinking #1, #2, #3, and #4. The following rubric will be used to assess students’ exam answers regarding the Student Learning Objectives for Critical Thinking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Objective</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Develop a clear understanding of moral reasoning theories and concepts.</td>
<td>Relies on summary lecture/textbook with little interpretation</td>
<td>Identifies important elements with minor omissions</td>
<td>Identifies important elements and communicates elements in student’s voice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Investigate the breadth and depth of points of views regarding ethical scenarios.</td>
<td>Unable to acknowledge or elaborate on all points of views</td>
<td>Acknowledges breadth but may require more depth regarding points of views</td>
<td>Acknowledges and articulates the breadth and depth of all points of views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Interpret the significance of gathered information and how to apply it to develop an ethical solution.</td>
<td>Applies little significant information to develop solution.</td>
<td>Assesses significance of information to develop solution containing minor lack of specificity</td>
<td>Assesses significance of information to develop solid solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Precisely communicate implications and resolutions to potential stakeholders.</td>
<td>Inadequate portrayal of implications and provides indecisive resolution</td>
<td>Addresses implications and provides resolution</td>
<td>Addresses positive and negative implications and provides decisive resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moral Reasoning Position Paper:
All students will face potential ethical dilemmas in their specific communication careers. To prepare them for this, students will write a 3-5 page paper arguing for or against a specific moral reasoning strategy. For example, Students will select deontology, virtue ethics, teleology, or a sub-component of these (such as utilitarianism, social contract, veil of ignorance, etc.) and present a case why their selected reasoning method is superior or inferior as a guide to assist them in resolving ethical dilemmas specific to their future communication careers. Students will be graded on their abilities to support their claims and apply their arguments to their specific future communication careers. All papers must be typed, stapled or paper-clipped, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins, with all sources cited using APA guidelines. Late papers will not be accepted. In particular, this paper will assess Student Learning Objectives for Critical Thinking #1, #2, #3, and #4.

Case Study Paper (7-10 pages):
Students will select a current social topic/dilemma not analyzed in class that pertains to communication and ethics. These topics will be selected in consultation with the professor. For example, students might examine the Sheriff B.J. Roberts’s 2009 firing of a deputy over a Facebook like of another candidate for Sheriff, the controversial Westboro Baptist Church protests, NPR’s firing of Juan Williams, 1989 Disney threats to remove Disney characters from Florida daycare center walls, U.S. anti-terrorism laws (Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project), Ricky Gervais insults at the 2010 Golden Globes, Axe advertising campaigns, 2016 U.S. presidential campaign issues, etc. Next, students will consider the vantage point that they will be arguing from, such as a communication practitioner, legislator, protestors, onlooker, etc. (this vantage point should represent a specific person unique to the dilemma) and determine the specific dilemma that must be resolved.

Then, students will write a 7-10 page paper that argues their personal moral approach toward this specified current dilemma. This moral approach will take a firm stand by applying moral reasoning to reach a decisive action to resolve the dilemma. The paper will provide in-depth analysis from an ethical perspective in order to support the student’s line of thought. All papers must be typed,
Late work and Make-ups: Make-up exams are only given for extreme cases, such as hospitalization. Students should present the instructor with objective evidence (e.g., hospital paperwork) regarding potential make-ups. If you are a member of a university-sponsored organization, please present the professor with a valid letter identifying all dates that you will miss at the beginning of the semester. No late papers will be accepted. All papers should be turned in as hard copies to the professor.
The Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act of 1973:
If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, contact Disability Services at 281-283-2648 or disability@uhcl.edu as soon as possible and complete the registration process. To ensure your accommodations are in place for the entire semester, please request your accommodation letters from Disability Services and provide them to me at the beginning of the semester. The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students with a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, each University within the System strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them.

Email:
Students are expected to compose professional emails if contacting the instructor. Please allow at least two business days for a professional response from your instructor.

Academic Honesty
All UHCL students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UHCL catalog and the Student Life Handbook for the University Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism, that is, using research without citations, or a created product without crediting the source, will result in a grade penalty or failure of the course.

Faculty Course Evaluation
At the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation used by the University to monitor the quality of the instruction. You should take this evaluation seriously and answer each item to the best of your ability since the cumulative results are important to the University and to me. The confidentiality of your responses is protected: you submit your evaluation anonymously and I will receive the summary of the evaluations only after your final grades for the course have been submitted.

**Fall 2016 Schedule subject to change**
8/22 M- Syllabus; The Branches of Ethics, Communication, and the Need for Responsibility, read (Bobbitt) 1-18, **Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 78**

8/29 M- cont’d; Moral Reasoning and Critical Perspectives, read (Bobbitt) 19-45, **Case Study (Bobbitt) 73, Case Study (Bobbitt) 100**

9/5 M- **No Class—Labor Day**

9/12 M- The Social Contract, read **Locke article**, read **Rawls article**; **Privacy, confidentiality, and repercussions**, read (Bobbitt) 105-126, 197-198; **Case study (Bobbitt) 97, Case Study (Bobbitt) 141, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 204**

9/19 M- Conflict of interest (Bobbitt) 85-86, 126-129; **Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 102; Ethics Exam 1**

9/26 M- Open Forums and the Public Sphere, read **Habermas article**, **Case Study (Bobbitt) 201-202**; Social Media and Participation Fetishism in a Digital Age

10/3 M- Entertainment’s affect on society; read (Bobbitt) 47-70; read **Morgan article**, **Case study (Bobbitt) 76-77, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 79, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 80**

10/10 M- cont’d; Communication and children, read (Bobbitt) 159, **Case Study (Bobbitt) 167; Moral Reasoning Position Paper due**

10/17 M- cont’d; Explicit material, art, and religious structure; Communication in the Workplace, read (Bobbitt) 237-247, **Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 251, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 252, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 253**

10/24 M- cont’d; review

10/31 M- **Ethics Exam 2**; Ideology, Politics, and Appealing to the Masses, read (Bobbitt) 213-228, **Case Study (Bobbitt) 231, Case Study (Bobbitt) 233, Discussion Problem (Bobbitt) 234**

11/7 M- cont’d; The Ethics of advertising and exploitation, read (Bobbitt) 151-163 and **Debord article**, **Case Study (Bobbitt) 168, Case Study (Bobbitt) 169-170, Case Study (Bobbitt) 173, Last day to withdraw**

11/14 M- cont’d

11/21 M- cont’d; Stereotypes and communication

11/28 M- cont’d; review; **Case Study Paper due**

12/5 M- **Ethics Exam 3 4:00pm**