

COMM 3355 Communication Ethics  
Fall 2016, Section 1 (Bayou 1313) M 4:00pm-6:50pm  
Dr. Brent Kice  
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Office hours: M 12:00-2:00, TTh 10:00-12:00, or by appointment  
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Department of Communication and Studio Arts

- Textbook: Bobbitt, Randy. (2009). *Decisions, decisions: Case studies and discussion problems in communication ethics*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Articles: Debord, G. (1967). Chapter one. *Society of the Spectacle*.
- Habermas, Jurgen. (1974). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article." *New German Critique*, 3, 49-55.
- 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*.
- Morgan, Rhian. (2013). Death in space and the piracy debate: Negotiating ethics and ontology in Entropia Universe. *Global Media Journal, Australian Edition*, 7, 1.
- Rawls, John. (1999). The veil of ignorance. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard UP: Cambridge, MA, 118-23.

(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*.



This class emphasizes  
**Communication**

#### 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

A	920-1000	C	720-799
A-	900-919	C-	700-719
B+	880-899	D+	680-699
B	820-879	D	620-679
B-	800-819	D-	600-619
C+	780-799	F	0-599

### 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:

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

### 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, protestor, 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,

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.

*A Criteria "Excellent"*

Paper meets seven page minimum, free of any grammar/spelling mistakes, all sources cited properly according to APA format, uses minimum of seven academic, credible outside sources (other than class texts) to support argument, logical development of ideas, addresses all components of the case study (background, individuals/groups involved), provides ethical exploration of the issue, demonstrates a mastery of concepts learned in class, flawlessly integrates concepts learned in class into paper, provides proper reasoning regarding a decisive resolution to the case study, acknowledges possible flaws to your final resolution (weigh costs and benefits), displays higher order thinking worthy of a 3000 level course.

*B Criteria "Above Average"*

Paper meets seven page minimum, free of any grammar/spelling mistakes, all sources cited properly according to APA format, uses minimum of four academic, credible outside sources (other than class texts) to support argument, logical development of ideas, addresses all components of the case study (background, individuals/groups involved), provides ethical exploration of the issue, demonstrates an understanding of concepts learned in class, integrates concepts learned in class into paper, provides proper reasoning regarding a decisive resolution to the case study, acknowledges possible flaws to your final resolution (weighs costs and benefits).

*C Criteria "Average"*

Paper meets seven page minimum, few grammar/spelling mistakes, all sources cited properly according to APA format, addresses all components of the case study (background, individuals/groups involved), provides ethical exploration of the issue, references concepts learned in class, provides proper reasoning regarding a decisive resolution to the case study, acknowledges possible flaws to your final resolution (weighs costs and benefits).

*D Criteria "Below Average"*

Paper meets seven page minimum, few grammar/spelling mistakes, improper citations according to APA format, does not address all components of the case study, does not provide in-depth exploration of the ethical issues involved in the case study, fails to reference concepts learned in class, provides an indecisive resolution to the case study, does not address all flaws to your final resolution.

*F Criteria "Fails to meet requirements of assignment"*

Paper fails to meet seven page minimum, paper fails to address the ethical issues involved in the case study, paper fails to follow APA format, paper fails to address components of case study, paper fails to explore ethical issues of case study, paper fails to demonstrate proper development expected in a 3000 level course.

Participation:

Students are expected to come to class prepared. Students are also expected to have read and be willing to discuss in detail the assigned case studies and articles. Physical presence does not constitute participation.

- 100 pts.** Students voicing quality ideas during every class discussion, thorough engagement in case studies, and coming to class late a maximum of one time
- 80-90 pts.** (depending on the voicing of ideas) Students voicing quality ideas at least once per week, thorough engagement in case studies, and coming to class late a maximum of one time
- 70 pts.** Students voicing ideas at least once per week, mediocre engagement in case studies, and coming to class late a maximum of two times
- 60 pts.** Students voicing ideas at least once every two weeks, mediocre engagement in case studies, and coming to class late a maximum of two times
- 0-50 pts.** (depending on severity of lack of ideas and lateness) Students rarely voicing ideas, poor engagement in case studies, and coming to class late more than two times

Respect:

The nature of the class demands that all students respect each other. Students will be expected to allow their fellow classmates to speak without interruption. On that same note, no student should dominate discussion, rather students should create an atmosphere that invites all students to participate. The intended atmosphere of the class is one where all students should feel comfortable. Naturally, students will have differing opinions, and many will not be easily swayed, but this difference creates learning. It is completely acceptable to have an opinion that differs from others. With this being said, all discussion will be geared toward the logical arguments themselves, not at the speakers. Verbal attacks will not be tolerated, this includes bullying another student who has knowingly become flustered during the process of discussion.

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](mailto: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**