



Course Syllabus: Media Ethics  
College of Fine Arts  
MCOM 3730 Section 180  
Fall 2021

Contact Information

Instructor: Christy M. Johnson, M.Ed.  
Office: None  
Office hours: By appointment only  
E-mail: [christy.johnson@msutexas.edu](mailto:christy.johnson@msutexas.edu)

**Course Description**

- Students will examine ethical issues as they relate to both historical and current practice in mass communication.
- Students will learn to methodically analyze ethical dilemmas to determine the best courses of action for all concerned.
- Students will understand how decisions made by media organizations affect individuals, the public, societal institutions, specific constituencies and society as a whole.

As this is a survey course, emphasis will be placed on gaining a broad, general understanding, and it will be difficult to study specific topics in depth.

**Textbook & Instructional Materials**

Required: Zay N. Smith and Pamela Zekman, "The Mirage" (information will be given in class on obtaining this book)

No formal textbook will be used for this class. However, we will be using numerous other sources and resources, which will be posted in D2L or handed out in class. There will be considerable outside assignments and/or research to supplement in-class discussions.

**Student Handbook**

Refer to: [Student Handbook-2020-21](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

## Grading

Final grades will be based on written ethics assignments, weekly discussions, a semester project and a final exam. You should take note that you will be required to do a lot of writing over the course of the semester, and the quality of your writing will be a factor in your final grade. In addition, you will be required to spend some time in public-speaking situations.

In all formats, you will be required to think critically about the topics being discussed and form coherent, defensible positions. A textbook or rote memorization cannot help you figure out what to do in real life when you have an ethical dilemma. You need to methodically analyze the situation. As a result, I'm not interested in true-false or multiple choices tests, nor am I interested in having you quote back the literature to me. Details on all assignments will be given as the semester progresses.

As far as grading goes, please know that I consider an A to mean "excellent/outstanding," a B to mean "above average," and a C to mean "average." Please remember these interpretations as the semester progresses.

Assignments	%
Weekly Ethics Assignments	25
Discussion Leader/Discussions	25
Project	25
Final Exam	25
Total Percentage	100

Table 2: Final Letter Grades

Grade	Percentage
A	90-100
B	80 to 89
C	70 to 79
D	60 to 69
F	Less than 60

## Homework

Much of the reading for this class will take place on your own time. Readings will be posted by Sunday evening. These should be read prior to class Tuesday. Additional readings will be posted as needed.

## Weekly Ethics Assignments

These (roughly) weekly assignments will be worth 25% of your grade. There will be roughly 10 of these assigned over the course of the semester. These assignments will require you to comment on the current mass media's performance related to ethics.

### **Discussion Leader/Discussions**

Worth 25% of your grade, you will be required to lead one weekly discussion during the semester. This grade, however, will also include your participation in other students' discussions of current state of media ethics. You will use the weekly schedule to determine your topic. We will assign weeks during Week 2.

### **Semester Project and Presentation**

Each student will complete a project, worth 25% of the final grade, working either in a small group or individually. More details will be given during the first 3 weeks of class.

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will be a take-home essay that asks you to tie together aspects of the course and evaluate various issues. You will have several days to work on your answers, which will be due the last day of the semester (prior to finals week), Friday, December 3 at 10 p.m. In lieu of an in-class final exam, we will spend the final exam session discussing your responses.

### **Quizzes**

While there are no regularly scheduled quizzes, I reserve the right to give a quiz if I feel that students are not keeping up with the readings, attending class regularly or participating in discussions fully.

### **Extra Credit**

I do not offer extra credit. If you complete your work on time and in full, you will have no problem passing this course.

### **Late Work**

Please note that there is no provision for late work. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing deadline, please contact me. I reserve the right to determine whether a late assignment or project will be accepted.

### **Make Up Work**

If you have an excused absence, as determined by me and with prior approval, you may make up the work you have missed. Work missed should be completed by the next possible class period. However, an absence is not automatically excused, and you should make every effort to be in class, on time to avoid zeroes on missed assignments.

### **Important Dates**

Last day for term schedule changes: August 23-26

Deadline to file for graduation: Sept. 27

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" October 25

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

## Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

## Attendance

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled, which includes this course. If you have to miss a class or a deadline for any reason, please contact me IN ADVANCE to let me know. Contacting me in advance, however, does not automatically excuse the absence, but it is a lot better than letting me know after the fact. If you fail to contact me within 24 hours of missing a class, it will be very difficult for me to excuse the absence. Please note that work, non-emergency medical and dental appointments, late nights, intramural games, studying for other classes, and the like do NOT constitute excused absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. See also the Make Up Work policy.

If you need to miss class due to a religious holiday or due to a university-sponsored event, please see me as far in advance as possible. You will be required to complete the assigned work (or an alternate assignment) on or before the due date, and you will be required to submit an official form from the university prior to your absence.

Simply put, you can't do your job as a student in this class if you aren't there to do it.

On a related note, I expect you to be in class on time. I understand that things happen, but chronic tardiness will be noted and could lower your final grade.

## Online Computer Requirements

This class will make extensive use of D2L in order to provide materials and a place to turn in work. That requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class.

***Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. **Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!** There are many places to access your class! Our course can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers.

due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

### **My Class Policies**

**Cell phones:** While there are times we will make use of apps or sites for class engagement and participation, for the most part, you should leave your cell phone out of sight and silent. Likewise, earbuds will only rarely be needed, so leave them out of sight as well.

**Computers/laptops:** The use of technology for notetaking and research in class is one that I know will be useful. However, should you abuse this privilege by using class time to complete other assignments, catch up on your shows, browse your favorite website, shop, check emails, etc., the privilege will cease. This will not be up for discussion, and I will ask you to close and/or power off your device.

**Conduct:** You are not in high school, and I shouldn't have to monitor behavior in my class. In this class, we could be discussing controversial issues, and it is important that our behavior remain respectful and polite.

**Communication:** As an adjunct, I do not have regular office hours or even an office phone number. We will use D2L and Remind to stay in touch. I try to check my emails daily; however, do not expect immediate replies. Please use proper grammar and punctuation when communicating with me.

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand my expectations for students concerning attendance, attitude and work ethic.

MSU faculty also have the option of filing an Academic Referral and/or a Conduct Referral with appropriate offices, both of which will follow-up with students. I reserve the right to file such referrals when needed. I will always try to contact the student first to request a meeting, but if the student does not respond appropriately, I will file the relevant referral(s).

### **Change of Schedule**

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

### **Refund and Repayment Policy**

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state)

exists in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

### **College Policies**

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

### **Grade Appeal Process**

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#)

### **Mass Communication Portfolio**

Please note that all mass communication majors are required to submit a portfolio during their Internship course (please note that Internship is a prerequisite to Senior Production). This requirement is a part of MSU's reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and is non-negotiable. Students are required to demonstrate communication competence through the written word and visual communication; two examples of each competency are required for the portfolio.

As you go through this and other classes, you are responsible for saving course work that could be included in your portfolio.

Please see me, your adviser or any mass communication faculty member for handouts with more information (“Mass Communication Portfolio Competencies” and “Mass Communication Portfolio FAQ”). These handouts are also available at:

Mass Comm. Portfolio-1

(<http://mwsu.edu/Assets/documents/academics/finearts/masscomm/portfolio%20competency%20handout%202013.pdf>)

Mass Comm. Portfolio-2

(<http://mwsu.edu/Assets/documents/academics/finearts/masscomm/senior-portfolio-faq.pdf>)

Mass Comm. Portfolio-3

(<http://mwsu.edu/Assets/documents/academics/finearts/masscomm/Portfolio%20Rubric.pdf>)

Mass Comm. Portfolio-4

(<http://mwsu.edu/Assets/documents/academics/finearts/masscomm/Documentaries%20Rubric.pdf>)

### **Course Schedule**

Please see the following course schedule. A more detailed version will also be posted in D2L.

Notice:

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at my discretion.

## Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Assignments
Week 1 August 24/26	Intro and Explanations Defining Ethics	
Week 2 Aug. 31/Sept 2	Codes of Ethics	Project Instructions
Week 3 Sept. 7/9	Accuracy, Fairness, and Deception	Project Topics Chosen
Week 4 Sept. 14/16	Minimizing Harm/Humanity	Project Proposals
Week 5 Sept. 21/23	Diversity and Sensitive Subjects	
Week 6 Sept. 28/30	Conflict of Interest	
Week 7 Oct. 5/7	Photojournalism/visuals	
Week 8 Oct. 12/14	Privacy and Confidentiality	
Week 9 Oct. 19/21	Accountability, Transparency and Social Responsibility	
Week 10 Oct. 26/28	Investigative Reporting "The Mirage" (p. 1-121)	
Week 11 Nov. 2/4	"The Mirage" Part II (p. 122- 212)	
Week 12 Nov. 9/11	"The Mirage Part III (p. 213- 255)	
Week 13 Nov. 16/18	Project Presentations	Mirage Essay due
Week 14 Nov. 23/25	Project Presentations <b>(No Class Thursday)</b>	Final Exam Questions
Week 15 Nov. 30/Dec. 2	Project Presentations	Final Exam due Dec. 4
Week 16 Dec. 7	Dec. 7, 5:45 pm Final Exam Discussion	