

COMM 498:
ETHICAL ISSUES IN ENTERTAINMENT AND COMMUNICATION
6:30 p.m. – 9:20 p.m.
ANN 209

Syllabus, Fall 2015

Instructor:

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Visiting Scholar

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Course Objectives:

COMM 498 is a seminar course centered on ethical issues as they play out in the world of entertainment and communication. The issues covered in this class were touched upon in COMM 310, but—through probing discussions, made possible by our small class size—we will explore them in greater depth. This means that, during your time in class, you must listen actively, reflect critically, form your own opinions, and share them with your peers and professor; outside of class, you must read assigned texts closely, write papers and prepare oral reports that support your original arguments with evidence, and respond to your instructor's critiques of your work.

During the course of the semester, we will attempt to examine prevailing standards of ethical behavior in the media and communication industry—specifically their derivation, justification and actual practice—using case studies, founded upon readings and the experience of communication and media professionals who will speak to the class. The list of subjects that will be covered includes but is not limited to the notion of Hollywood and ethics as an oxymoron, the development of journalistic ethics in old and new media, ethical issues raised by the economic meltdown, the relation of public relations to journalism, work conditions in the communication industry, media representations of minorities, and government shutouts of the press. We will focus primarily on privacy, surveillance, and collision of civil rights and technology in the digital age.

Prerequisites:

Students are required to have completed COMM 310 prior to enrollment.

Calendar:

The speaker and reading schedule for each class will be posted to Blackboard one week prior to the class in question. *Note: posted speaker schedules are subject to change.*

Readings:

Readings will be posted on Blackboard either in the form of links or as scanned electronic documents. We will announce (via email and the Announcements page on Blackboard) when readings are posted.

Because of the emphasis of the class on ethical issues arising from the Internet information revolution, students will be expected to become familiar with *They Know Everything About You: How Data-- - collecting Corporations and Snooping Government Agencies Are Destroying Democracy* by Robert Scheer.

In addition to assigned readings, students will be expected to be conversant with current events. That means you should read and watch a variety of news sources on a daily basis. Speakers and Prof. Scheer will draw heavily upon the news during class discussions. In fact, each class will begin with a discussion of the latest news.

Grading:

- **Essay (15%):** Students will be required to write an argumentative essay in which they assert a specific position on an issue discussed in class and argue the validity of that position. An essay-writing guide will be posted on Blackboard before the second session of class. This essay should be approximately 1,200 words and submitted **by November 11, 2015.**
- **Oral Report (20%):** Students will be required to present an oral report, delving deeper into an issue touched upon in class. Presentations of oral reports will begin on the 4th week of classes (**Sept 16**) and end on the 12th week of classes (**November 11**). Your 10 to 15 minute presentation should include a power point presentation and a bibliography of works consulted, which will be submitted to Prof. Scheer. Topics will be approved by Prof. Scheer.
- **Final Exam (30%):** This exam will consist of short answer questions and an essay. Details TBA.

- **Attendance (15%) and in classroom Participation (20%):** Because this is a seminar course, a significant portion of your grade will reflect your attendance as well as the quality of your participation in class discussions. Attendance is mandatory and will be recorded on a weekly basis after the first week of class. Only documented excuses, submitted to Isabel and Prof. Scheer, will be accepted.

Non emergency-related travel (with the exception of certain university-sponsored events) and life's inconveniences, such as traffic and work, will not count as acceptable excuses. If you are required to attend a university-sponsored event at the time of class, please notify Isabel and Prof. Scheer via email in advance of the class you anticipate missing.

Late Work:

Assignments will be docked a half letter grade for each day they are submitted late. Assignments submitted more than three days after the due date, without previous arrangements having made for extenuating circumstances, will not be accepted.

Phones and Computers in the Classroom:

During lecture and discussion, phones must be turned off, and computers and tablets may only be used for note-taking purposes.

Academic Integrity Policy:

The USC Annenberg School for Communication is committed to maintaining the highest standards of academic excellence. It endorses and follows the policies and procedures of the University Conduct Code as indicated in the SCampus. It is particularly important that you avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, forging another student's signature on the attendance form or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself as your own. If you are caught cheating on an assignment you will receive an F for the entire percentage allocated to that assignment or group of assignments. (e.g. If you plagiarize on one position paper, we reserve the right to give you a 0 on all of your assignments. If you cheat on an exam, you will receive an F on your exam and possibly an F for the semester) If you have any questions about these practices, confer with a faculty member.

Academic Resources:

If you have a learning disability and require accommodation, please provide formal documentation at least two weeks prior to the exam. Please visit <http://www.usc.edu/student--affairs/asn/DSP/index.html> if you have questions about accommodations for students with learning disabilities.