

COMM 498: Ethical Issues in Entertainment & Communication
4 Units—Fall 2019
Thursdays, 12:30 – 3:20 p.m.
Section: 20771
Location: ANN L115

Instructor: Dr. Allissa V. Richardson
Office: ANN 204D
Office Hours: Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and by appointment, in-person or via Skype
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Course Description

Amazon Alexa devices may be spying on you. Jay-Z's TIDAL streaming service is not as popular as he once claimed. Facebook (and nearly every other social media platform) make money from selling your data. All of these issues—and more—have become fodder for front-page news. It may seem as if every media innovation is followed by some unethical breach of its intended use nowadays. Why is this? Who makes the decisions about how our evolving media are leveraged? What are the elements of good decision-making anyway, as the dynamic media landscape continues to shift? In this course, you will learn about the major ethical conundrums that media producers face in this century. You will study the “epic fails” of the last decade or so, as companies struggled to adjust to changing audience demographics and social norms. You will learn also about the importance of diversity in the boardroom and what happens when that is not a reality. Lastly, you will be challenged to think critically about the sector of media production that you plan to enter. As you learn about its strengths and weakness, you will identify how you can be a part of the systemic changes you would like to see.

Overall Learning Objectives and Assessments

If you come to class prepared every week, participate in the discussions and think critically about the media you consume, you will leave this course prepared to:

1. Define the 21st-century ethical dilemmas that various media formats face today.
2. Explain the process of ethical decision-making from the vantage point of a media producer.
3. Identify, through case studies, what makes a good ethical decision (and a bad one).
4. Describe an intervention that you will make as an early career leader in media.

Description of Assignments

There are four ways you will be assessed in this course. You will participate in monthly online discussions of each learning module. You will bring a case study to class each week for our discussions. Then, for the two-part final exam you will give a presentation and write a 1,000-word paper. Here is a description of each assignment.

Online Discussions of Readings/Videos

At the end of every learning module, I ask an overarching question about what you have learned in the three weeks prior. You will respond to my discussion thread within Blackboard (Bb) in 500 words or less. There will be four discussion questions during the course. In order to earn full credit, you must provide a substantive response to at least two other classmates' posts to the Discussion Board on Bb.

The Five-Minute Media Ethics Case Study

Before class each week, you will listen to our “Song/Podcast of the Week” and watch the “Explainer Video” I have posted in Bb. Both learning materials offer an overview of what we will discuss in class on Thursday. After

listening and watching, find an example of an ethical breach that relates to our topic. You will present it in “The Five-Minute Media Ethics Case Study” portion of our class. You will use [this template](#) each time. You will present 10 case studies total during the course.

Your Ethical Intervention: The Presentation

Your final exam will have two parts. In the first portion, you will present an ethical intervention you would like to make as soon as you enter the media workforce. You will discuss how you plan to measure your success and how you can inspire others on your team to follow your lead.

Your Ethical Intervention: The Reflection Paper

The second portion of your final exam consists of a reflection paper. In 750-1,000 words, you will describe how you thought of your desired career path in media before this class, and what changed after the course. You will discuss also what you believe will be the most challenging parts of achieving the ethical changes you would like to see in your chosen media field, and how you will overcome it.

Grading Summary

Assignment	% of Grade
Online Discussions of Readings/Videos (4 @ 6.25 pt. ea.)	25%
The Five-Minute Media Ethics Case Study (10 @ 2.5 pts. ea.)	25%
Your Ethical Intervention: The Presentation	25%
Your Ethical Intervention: The Reflection Paper	25%
Total:	100%

Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

Assignment Submission Policy

Please submit your work to the class Blackboard (Bb) site by the posted deadline dates. I do not accept emailed assignments. I grade your work in Bb and provide detailed comments there. If you do not submit your work to Bb by the designated deadline, your grade will be reduced by one full letter grade every day that it is late.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

There is not a required text for this course. Required readings are included in the syllabus and others will occasionally be distributed via Blackboard. The readings will be discussed in class, and they will help inform the assignments for this course. Please read them.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/19/19 – 12/18/19)

Fri., September 13: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Fri., September 13: Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, September 17: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

Fri., October 11: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Fri., October 11: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Fri., November 15: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

Policies and Procedures

Please submit all of your assignments on Blackboard (Bb) by the deadlines indicated below. Late assignments will be docked one letter grade per day. If you have a medical emergency that precludes you from submitting your work online, please bring the necessary documentation when you return to class so I can reopen the Bb submission portal for you.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (<http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>).

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Lastly, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without the approval of your instructor. Double dipping is NOT allowed in this course. If you repurpose this assignment in another course or from a previous course, you will earn an F for the recycled project.

Support Systems

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.
engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Instructor Bio

Allissa V. Richardson, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Journalism at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She has taught mobile journalism throughout Africa, Europe and the U.S. Richardson is a Nieman Foundation Visiting Journalism Fellow at Harvard University, a two-time Apple Distinguished Educator, and the 2012 Journalism Educator of the Year for the National Association of Black Journalists. She has published original research in *Journal of Communication*, *The Black Scholar*, *Digital Journalism*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, *Journalism Studies* and *Teaching Media Quarterly*. Her forthcoming book, *Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones and the New Protest #Journalism*, will be published by Oxford University Press in May 2020. Richardson holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Xavier University of Louisiana; a Master's degree in Magazine Publishing from Northwestern University's Medill School, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Maryland College Park's Philip Merrill College of Journalism.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change—and probably will change—based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

UNIT I—THE ETHICS OF SEEING

“Free is when the TV ain’t controllin’ what we see...”
—Meek Mill

Week 1—August 29 [The Ethics of TV]

Kanye West is Canceled; Roseanne is too: TV and the Rise of the Cultural Boycott

Listen to this: “[What’s Free](#),” by Meek Mill feat. Rick Ross & Jay-Z. View the [lyrics here](#).

Watch this: “[Roseanne, Interrupted: Here’s What Barr’s Life is Like Now](#),” by VICE News.

Read this: “[Everyone is Canceled](#),” by Jonah Engel Bromwich in *The New York Times*.

And this: Kohm, Steven A. “Naming, shaming and criminal justice: Mass-mediated humiliation as entertainment and punishment.” *Crime, Media, Culture* 5, no. 2 (2009): 188-205.

Week 2—September 5 [The Ethics of Film]

#MeToo, Times Up and the Great Film Shake-up of 2017

Listen to this: “[Praying](#),” by Kesha. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[How Harvey Weinstein’s Sexual Abuse Cover Up Fell Apart](#),” by *The New Yorker*.

Read this: “[Speaking Out About Harvey Weinstein](#),” by Lupita Nyong’o in *The New York Times*.

And this: Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller. “#MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 25, no. 2 (2018): 236-246.

Week 3—September 12 [The Ethics of Extended Reality]

Augmented and Virtual Reality: Tools for Building Empathy or Surveillance?

Listen to this: “[Police State](#),” by dead prez. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[The Ethical and Moral Dilemmas of Mixed Reality](#),” by Kent Bye.

Read this: “[VR and AR: The Ethical Challenges Ahead](#),” by Emory Craig & Maya Georgieva in *Educause*.

And this: Nash, Kate. “Virtual reality witness: exploring the ethics of mediated presence.” *Studies in Documentary Film* 12, no. 2 (2018): 119-131.

Week 4—September 19 [The Ethics of Mobile Video]

The Meaning of Bearing Witness

Listen to this: “[This is America](#),” by Childish Gambino. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[How StingRay cellphone surveillance devices work](#),” by *The Washington Post*.

Read this: “[Bearing Witness While Black: Theorizing African American mobile journalism after Ferguson](#),” by Allissa V. Richardson in *Digital Journalism*.

And this: Richardson, Allissa V. “[Dismantling Respectability: The Rise of New Womanist Communication Models in the Era of Black Lives Matter](#).” *Journal of Communication* 69, no. 2 (2019): 193-213.

Note: Class is in the [Bovard Auditorium](#) today! I will be delivering a lecture in conjunction with the President’s Faculty Symposium. It’s called *Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones and the New Protest #Journalism*. Please attend the talk and answer our online discussion question.

Online Discussion #1 due next week: Submit your comments to Bb by Thurs., Sept. 26 at 12 PM.

UNIT II—THE ETHICS OF LISTENING

“Men lie, women lie, numbers don’t.”

—Jay-Z

Week 5—September 26 [The Ethics of Music Streaming]

When Numbers Lie: Jay-Z and the TIDAL Streaming Scandal

Listen to this: “[Reminder](#),” by Jay-Z. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[TIDAL responds to claim company is faking Beyoncé & Kanye numbers](#),” by *Complex News*.

Read this: “[Capitalism has failed, and Jay-Z’s Streaming Scandal is proof](#),” by Kitanya Harrison in *Medium*.

And this: Hesmondhalgh, David, and Leslie M. Meier. “What the digitalisation of music tells us about capitalism, culture and the power of the information technology sector.” *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 11 (2018): 1555-1570.

Week 6—October 3 [The Ethics of Podcasting]

Promotion, Profit and Promises: The Ethics of Podcasting

Listen to this: “[Podcast or fraud-cast?](#)” on NPR’s *Ask Me Another*.

Watch this: “[The second golden age of podcasting](#),” by *SXSW*.

Read this: “[Ads for podcasts test the line between story and sponsor](#),” by Dino Grandoni in *The New York Times*.

And this: Markman, Kris M. “Considerations—Reflections and Future Research. Everything Old is New Again: Podcasting as Radio’s Revival.” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, no. 2 (2015): 240-243.

Week 7—October 10 [The Ethics of Radio Broadcasting]

Radio Silence: The Rise of #MuteRKelly Movement

Listen to this: “[I Admit](#)” by R. Kelly. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[Surviving R. Kelly: Starting the #MuteRKelly Movement](#),” by *Lifetime*.

Read this: “[R. Kelly reporter Jim DeRogatis talks relentless pursuit of ‘serial sexual predator’](#)” by Althea Legaspi in *Rolling Stone*; AND “[Here is the full list of R. Kelly collaborations removed from streaming services](#),” by Will Gottsegen in *SPIN*.

And this: Lutz, Christoph, and Christian Pieter Hoffmann. “The dark side of online participation: exploring non-, passive and negative participation.” *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 6 (2017): 876-897.

Week 8—October 17 [The Ethics of Musical Gentrification]

#DontMuteDC: The Fight to Take Up Space (and Airwaves) in the Nation’s Capitol

Listen to this: “[Bustin’ Loose](#),” by Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers.

Watch this: “[Go-go music returns to Shaw’s Metro PCS store after #DontMuteDC protests](#),” by *Washington Post*.

Read this: “[Go-Go Music as a Rallying Call to Resist Gentrification](#),” by Briana Younger in *The New Yorker*.

And this: Gibson, Chris, and Shane Homan. “Urban redevelopment, live music and public space: Cultural performance and the re-making of Marrickville.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10, no. 1 (2004): 67-84.

Online Discussion #2 due next week: Submit your comments to Bb by Thurs., Oct. 24 at 12 PM.

UNIT III—THE ETHICS OF WIRED LIFE

“They ‘trust’ me. Dumb f*cks.”
—Mark Zuckerberg, *Founder of Facebook*

Week 9—October 24 [The Ethics of Social Media Content Moderation]

Social Media: Platform or Publisher?

Listen to this: “[Intentions](#),” by Macklemore. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[Content Moderation and Free Speech](#),” on Netflix’s *Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*

Read this: “[Liability for Content Hosts: An Overview of the Communication Decency Act’s Section 230](#),” by the Congressional Research Service.

And this: Bakir, Vian, and Andrew McStay. “Fake news and the economy of emotions: Problems, causes, solutions.” *Digital journalism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 154-175.

Week 10—October 31 [The Ethics of Algorithms]

If You Like This, You Might Also Like This...

Listen to this: “[Can Computer Programs Be Racist and Sexist?](#)” on *NPR*.

Watch this: “[Full Frontal with Samantha Bee: Black Futures Month](#),” on *TBS*.

Read this: “[The Algorithmic Rise of the Alt-Right](#),” by Jessie Daniels in *Contexts*.

And this: Noble, Safiya Umoja. “Introduction” in *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. NYU Press, 2018.

Online Discussion #3 due next week: Submit your comments to Bb by Thurs., Nov. 7 at 12 PM.

Week 11—November 7 [The Ethics of Facial Recognition]

Facial Recognition, Bias and the Rise of Mistaken Identity

Listen to this: “[Smile! You’re on Amazon’s camera](#),” by Mary Harris on *Slate*.

Watch this: “[Why cities are banning facial recognition technology](#),” by *WIRED*.

Read this: “[Facial recognition is accurate, if you’re a white guy](#),” by Steven Lohr in *The New York Times*.

And this: Introna, Lucas, and David Wood. “Picturing algorithmic surveillance: The politics of facial recognition systems.” *Surveillance & Society* 2, no. 2/3 (2004): 177-198.

Week 12—November 14 [The Ethics of AI]

Alexa, are you spying on me?

Listen to this: “[Somebody’s Watching Me](#),” by Rockwell. View the lyrics [here](#).

Watch this: “[Amazon Alexa Echo recorded conversation and then sent to contact](#),” by *CBS News*.

Read this: “[Amazon reportedly employs thousands of people to listen to your Alexa conversations](#),” by Jordan Valinsky in *CNN Business*.

And this: Woods, Heather Suzanne. “Asking more of Siri and Alexa: feminine persona in service of surveillance capitalism.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 35, no. 4 (2018): 334-349.

Online Discussion #4 due next week: Submit your comments to Bb by Thurs., Nov. 21 at 12 PM.

UNIT IV—YOUR INTERVENTION

Week 13—November 21 [Final Project Prep]

Putting it All Together: A Final Project Workshop

During this class we will brainstorm and outline your topics for the final project. When you return from the Thanksgiving break, you will present it. We will not have another class meeting before the presentations, so come to class this week with at least three viable ideas. Your classmates will help you select the strongest concept.

Week 14—November 28 [NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING]

Week 15—December 5 [Final Presentations Due]

You must present your ethical intervention in class to earn full credit for this assignment.

Please upload your slides to Bb before coming to class, by 12 PM.

Week 16—December 12 [NO CLASS/READING WEEK]

I have virtual office hours via FaceTime or Skype this week. I am here to read drafts of your final paper, to give you advice. Check Bb to make an appointment online.

Week 17—December 19 [Final Paper Due]

The second half of your final project is due.

Please upload your ethical intervention paper to Bb by 12 PM.