

COMM 392: COMMUNICATION ETHICS  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STEVENS POINT, FALL 2018  
(Tue. 11:00 – 12:50PM; 201 CAC)

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### Course Description and Objectives

Our world, our culture, and even our personalities are products of human communication. In constructing our social reality all of us hold some beliefs as to what our world *should* look like, how people *should* treat one another. These beliefs are anchored in our - often very clear - sense of what is *good* and *bad*, *right* and *wrong*. Yet, as history and contemporary public debates suggest, people may disagree as to what's right and wrong (think of contemporary controversial issues such as *capital punishment*, *abortion*, *stem-cell research*, or *same-sex marriage*). Clashing moral principles tend to surface as *ethical dilemmas* throughout professional life as well. During your career as a communication professional you'll face questions such as *is a particular PR/journalistic/business practice ethical or is it unethical? In a professional ethical dilemma, which is the morally "justifiable" choice?* Making tough ethical choices is never easy. There are no prescribed answers to ethical dilemmas that emerge from concrete professional situations. Therefore, instead of "teaching" you standard, universal "correct answers," this course is intended to help you acquire the tools and skills for ethical reasoning and decision making. By introducing you to the foundations of ethical thinking, the course seeks to

- enable you to recognize your own values through learning about theories and concepts of moral philosophy
- promote a sense of moral responsibility
- promote *tolerance of disagreement and ambiguity* with regard to moral dilemmas
- provide you (as a prospective communication professional) with skills in recognizing, analyzing, and approaching ethical dilemmas in communication situations
- through oral and written presentations, enable you to articulate and defend your position on morally loaded issues

### Required Texts

- Rachels, J. (2007). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Satris, S. (2008). *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Moral Issues*. McGraw-Hill
- C.S. Lewis (1952). *Mere Christianity (Book one: Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe)*
- Orwell, G. *Animal Farm*
  - All the above and additional readings and study materials shall be made available on the course website (D2L)

## Required Equipment

**This class uses “Turning Point Cloud” to do interactive polling.** You will need to purchase a Turning Technologies code from the bookstore to participate in the class. You will be required to check out a **clicker** from the **UWSP IT Service Desk** to respond to polling.

Check out of the clicker is at the **UWSP IT Service Desk in room 027 ALB, basement of the UWSP Library.** Device checkout is **free of charge.**

**Returning clickers:** Clickers must be returned to IT Service Desk before the end of finals. Students with unreturned clickers will be billed a late fee and/or may be billed the replacement cost of the clicker.

For Service Desk hours: <http://www.uwsp.edu/infotech/Pages/HelpDesk/default.aspx>

**You will need your UWSP Student ID to get your clicker.**

### Turning Point Account

You will need to create a Turning Technologies account in order to register your device to the class. Please use your UWSP email address to create an account here: <https://account.turningtechnologies.com/account/>

You can find help with Turning Point Cloud here: <https://www.turningtechnologies.com/support/turningpoint-cloud>

## Class Activities and Grading

Your final grade will be based on the following assignments and activities taking place over the course of the semester:

<b>Issue presentation:</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Congressional testimony:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Book review:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Analysis paper:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Quizzes:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Midterm exam:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Take-home final exam:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Participation in Discussions:</b>	<b>10%</b>

### *Grading scale for final grade:*

95 – 100% = A	84 – 86% = B	74 – 76% = C	60 – 66% = D
90 – 94% = A-	80 – 83% = B-	70 – 73% = C-	< 60% = F
87 – 89% = B+	77 – 79% = C+	67 – 69% = D+	

## Attendance

I will not take attendance formally. Yet, your regular attendance is a strong precursor of your final grade. Those who attend tend to do better on the assignments and the exams. Finally, if you're not present, you cannot take in-class quizzes, participate in class discussions, which will be detrimental to your final grade.

## Missed/Late Assignments

You are expected to give your presentation on the class day when you are scheduled. Given that presentations are scheduled in thematic order, if you miss your presentation, it will be impossible to make it up.

Written assignments must be handed in at the end of the class or submitted via D2L by the due date as specified the assignment description. Late papers receive a failing grade.

If you miss an exam or a quiz, unless you are granted an excused absence, you will not be permitted to make it up.

## Academic Honesty

When completing your assignments, you are expected to do original work. That is, you must avoid any form of plagiarism. I consider plagiarism - as defined by *Dictionary.com* – the “use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work”. A student caught on plagiarizing shall receive a failing grade for his/her assignment. Further academic misconduct shall be sanctioned in accordance with the *UWSP Chapter 14 – Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*.

## Conduct in Class

To provide a fruitful experience and an effective learning environment for all of us, I expect each of you to conduct yourself with respect for your fellow students, in line with the *UWSP Communal Bill of Rights*. Also,

- Students are to be seated in class by 11:00AM, by which I will be ready to teach. I consider lateness disruptive and an emergent pattern of lateness will be treated as equivalent to absences.
- Any use, including the visual display of **cell phones** is not tolerated in this class. By the beginning of class, all cell phones must be **turned off and put away** until the end of class. I consider any use of cell phones, including text messaging, as disrespectful and disruptive.
- Use of **laptop** computers and **tablets** is **not allowed** in class. Exception is made in case of students who are unable to take paper notes due to some documented physical condition.

## Course Schedule

(Note: This schedule is subject to change. Should changes occur, they will be announced in class)

Date	Topics and Activities	Reading Assignments & Tasks Due
4-Sep	Course introduction	
11-Sep	What is morality?	Rachels 1; C.S. Lewis
18-Sep	Culture and morality; Subjectivism in ethics; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 1	Rachels 2; 3
25-Sep	Religion and morality; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 2	Rachels 4
2-Oct	Ethical egoism; social contract; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 10	Rachels 5; 6
9-Oct	Utilitarianism; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 8	Rachels 7; 8
16-Oct	Kant and the categorical imperative; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 13	Rachels 9; 10
23-Oct	Feminism; The ethics of virtue; presentation & discussion: Satris issue 17	Rachels 11; 12; Satris issue 17; Book review due
30-Oct	Midterm exam; Animal Farm -- discussion	
6-Nov	Congressional hearings 1	Analysis paper due
13-Nov	Congressional hearings 2	
20-Nov	Congressional hearings 3	
27-Nov	Congressional hearings 4	
4-Dec	(Congressional hearings 5?) -- discussion	
11-Dec	Case study video for take-home final; Concluding the semester	