



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
School of Continuing Studies

Georgetown University  
BALS, School of Continuing Studies

## Communication and Media Ethics

BLHV 212 (42630)

Spring 2022 Jan 12, 2022 - May 14, 2022

Instructor: John Shook, PhD

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Class Meetings: Mondays 5:20–7:50pm – FIRST CLASS WED JAN 12

Location: 640 Mass Ave. room C215

Office Hours: Mondays 3–5pm at 640 Mass Ave

### Course Description

Ethical standards for valuable communications are needed more than ever. Internet ethics is for everyone, as we have become information generators and broadcasters too. Disinformation, propaganda, and ideology are disseminated by the people more effectively than any government. How can the value of free speech be preserved in our “post truth” world, without resorting to censorship? The media ethics of journalism upholds high standards of accuracy and honesty despite social and political pressures. Fake news and faked images are proliferating, requiring digital media ethics. A new global media ethics brings spotlights upon the causes of freedom, security, and justice for all peoples.

This new course meets either a Philosophy or Humanities Core Area requirement OR a Professional Media and Communications concentration elective.

### Course Objectives

Students will examine ethical questions at the intersections of communications, media, internet, society, and politics, and study interdisciplinary approaches and answers to those questions.

**Communication Ethics.** We are all communicators, generating and repeating perspectives on what we observe and judge about other people and the world. Communication’s human function is to strengthen social community. This principle exposes how any of us can mis-use communication methods, media, and technology to instead serve selfish aims, partisan advantages, or anti-social agendas. Ethics must be built into all communication.

**Internet Ethics.** In this internet age when people can easily reach and influence the minds of others, motivations and agendas behind social media behavior must be scrutinized. Disinformation, propaganda, and ideology are easily and quickly spread to millions of people by the same people themselves, more effectively than any government’s own broadcasting. Can social media apply its own restraints, to filter itself better before governments impose censorship? Free speech isn’t what it used to be during a by-gone era of newspapers and podiums. What is the value of free speech in our “post truth” world, while the internet is leaving many minds less free?

**Media Ethics.** The role of a journalist is provide information about matters of public importance to the public in timely and understandable ways. Duties to the Public: Social Importance, Accuracy, Non-Bias, Honesty, Civility. Duties to the Profession: Treatment of Sources, Information Gathering, Conflicts of Interest.

**Digital Media Ethics.** On the internet, anyone can report and spread “news”, including AI and bots. Genuine

journalism in the cybersphere of social media must figure out what is authentic and significant, filter out deception, fakery, and propaganda, and reach the online public with information that people can access and use.

Global Media Ethics. Traditional media objectives include (a) making government more transparent and accountable, (b) shining spotlights on suffering and injustice, and (c) covering issues important to minority and disadvantaged groups. Global objectives now add (d) reporting information needed on international and global scales, (e) exposing criminal and dangerous activities of countries that affect their citizens or their neighbors, and (f) supporting the causes of freedom, security, and justice for all peoples.

Students will additionally achieve individualized learning objectives while completing their assignments, with opportunities to:

- explore how controversies over journalistic integrity have many more dimensions in our times, complicating efforts to maintain journalism as a true profession;
- take multiple perspectives on the public's engagement with media, asking whether "consumers" of media content should receive what they want to hear, or what they need to hear;
- imagine how entertainment goals of social media could be more compatible with the public service aims of journalism; and
- join their own voices to ongoing debates about ethical and political controversies surrounding journalism and social media by contributing their well-informed assessments for academic consideration.

### **Required Texts**

[ do not purchase paper copies until after looking in Files in Canvas ]

Charles Ess. *Digital Media Ethics*, 3rd edn. Polity, 2019. ISBN 9781509533428

Philip Patterson et al. *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases*, 9<sup>th</sup> edn. Rowman and Littlefield, 2019. ISBN 978-1538112588

Alexander Klimburg. *The Darkening Web: The War for Cyberspace*. Penguin, 2018. ISBN 9780735222830

### **Course Requirements**

You are expected to do the readings, observe lectures, and engage with the course material in depth. Your responsibilities include completing all the assignments. Participation is essential to your success in this class. Students should spend approximately 12 hours per week on the work for each module.

1. Class Participation. Regular attendance at classes, participation in Discussion via Canvas, and a ten-minute presentation to the class in May about your research paper topic. 200 points possible. 20% of total grade.
2. Commentary Piece. 1000 words. A commentary piece, typical for a magazine or blog, offers insight and commentary on an issue of public importance, composed for a broad audience. Students will choose a current controversy related to a matter raised during the first six weeks. This commentary will either (a) support optimism about the public's ability to protect their personal information and privacy despite all of their online activities, or the commentary will (b) support pessimism about the public losing more and more privacy no matter how much they try to manage their online activity. 100 possible points. 10% of total grade.

3. Analytical Essay. 2000 words. This essay will fulfill two goals: (1) first explain how the media is expected to uphold standards of fairness and ethics while covering a major story of national or international importance; and then (2) explore why it can be very difficult to meet those expected standards while also trying to fulfill the responsibility of serving the public's best interests. 300 possible points. 30% of total grade.

4. Research Paper. 4000 words. On an issue of students' choice from the course's topics, except for issues already addressed by your previous assignments. You will first develop a one-page prospectus outlining your plan for the organization and goals of this paper, to be approved by the instructor. A successful paper addresses a prominent specific issue about today's journalistic or social media while synthesizing relevant information gained in the course (lectures and readings), information from a selected body of secondary literature, and the student's academic experience. 400 possible points. 40% of total grade.

Citation Style: The APA Style (APA Publication Manual 6th Edition) is used widely in SCS courses. Consult <http://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/APA>

**Final Grade**

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF TOTAL GRADE	POSSIBLE POINTS
Class Participation	20%	200
Commentary Piece – 1,000 words	10%	100
Analytical Essay – 2,000 words	30%	300
Research Paper – 4,000 words	40%	400
	TOTAL	1000 points

Total Points	Grade	Quality Points
920-1000	A	4.00
900-919	A-	3.67
881-899	B+	3.33
800-880	B	3.00
781-799	B-	2.67
761-780	C+	2.33
700-760	C	2.00
690-699	C-	1.67
680-689	D+	1.33
660-679	D	1.00
Less than 660	F	0.00

## Class Schedule

This tentative schedule is subject to change as necessary.

Week	Topic	Readings, Events
Week 1 Jan 15	Ethical Issues in Digital Media	<i>Digital Media Ethics</i> , chap. 1, 6
Week 2 no class	No class on Monday Jan 17 – MLK Day	
Week 3 Jan 24	Privacy in the Digital Era	<i>Digital Media Ethics</i> , chap. 2
Week 4 Jan 31	Privacy in the Digital Era	<i>Digital Media Ethics</i> , chap. 2
Week 5 Feb 7	Copying and Distributing Digital Media	<i>Digital Media Ethics</i> , chap. 3
Week 6 Feb 14	Who is a Friend Online?	<i>Digital Media Ethics</i> , chap. 4, 5
Week 7 no class	No class on Monday Feb 21 – President’s Day	
Week 8 Feb 28	Information Ethics–We are all Journalists Now	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 1, 2 Feb 28: Commentary paper due
Week 9 no class	No class on March 7 – spring break	
Week 10 March 14	Strategic Communications in Business	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 3
Week 11 March 21	Loyalty–Who deserves Protection and Justice?	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 4
Week 12 March 28	Democracy–Mass Media or Individualism?	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 5, 6
Week 13 April 4	Media Economics	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 7
Week 14 April 11	Photo and Video Journalism, Art and Entertainment	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 8, 10
Week 15 no class	No class on April 18 – Easter break	
Week 16 April 25	Information for Social Justice	<i>Media Ethics</i> , chap. 9, 11 April 25: Analytical paper due
Week 17 May 2	The War for Your Cyberspace	<i>The Darkening Web</i> , parts 1, 2, 3
Week 16 April 26	The Global War for Cyberspace	<i>The Darkening Web</i> , parts 4, 5, 6
Week 17 May 2	student presentations	
Week 18 May 3-10	complete Research paper	May 10: Research paper due

## Course Policies

Announcements: Announcements related to this course will be posted in Canvas regularly. They will appear on your Canvas dashboard when you log in and/or they will be sent to you directly through your preferred method of notification. Please make certain to check them regularly, as they will contain important information about upcoming projects or class concerns.

Email: Email me at [jrs384@georgetown.edu](mailto:jrs384@georgetown.edu). When submitting messages, please do the following:

- Put a subject in the subject box that includes the name of the course

Academic Support: Services and resources may include an online orientation; access to library resources; a readiness assessment or survey; testing services; tutoring; non-native language services; writing and/or math centers; tutorials or other forms of guidance on conducting research, writing papers, citing sources, using an online writing lab, and using institution-specific technology; supplemental instruction programs; and teaching assistants.

Writing Center: The Georgetown University [Writing Center](#) is a free resource open to all enrolled Georgetown students and offers online appointments.

Technical Support for Students:

- Canvas - Students have 24/7 access to <http://canvas.georgetown.edu/getting-help>, including live chat and a support hotline at (855) 338-2770
- Zoom - For support with Zoom, email: [zoom@georgetown.edu](mailto:zoom@georgetown.edu)
- Use of [Georgetown University-issued accounts](#) for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help managing your Google Documents, visit [Google Drive Help Center](#). Contact the UIS Service Center at [help@georgetown.edu](mailto:help@georgetown.edu) if you have a question regarding: your GU netID and/or password; your GU email account; or any connectivity issues.

## **Support Services:**

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- 202-687-8354 | [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)
- [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#)
- 202-687-6985
- [Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action \(IDEAA\)](#)
- (202) 687-4798

**Students' Religious Observances:** The following is university policy: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu). Individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others.

Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

**Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity:** During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings. The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

**Georgetown Honor System:** All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at <http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code>, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge: *In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

**Plagiarism:** In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail. If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

**Turnitin.com:** Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

**Sexual Misconduct:** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational programs, which includes sexual harassment or any acts of sexual misconduct. Title IX requires the University, upon becoming aware of any incident of sexual harassment and misconduct to respond appropriately to protect and maintain the safety of the University community, including students, faculty, and staff. Georgetown University prohibits sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Please know that as a faculty member I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. However, University policy also requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

**Jen Schweer, MA, LPC**

Associate Director of Health Education Services for  
Sexual Assault Response and Prevention

[\(202\) 687-0323](tel:(202)687-0323)

[jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu)

**Erica Shirley**

Trauma Specialist

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

[\(202\) 687-6985](tel:(202)687-6985)

[els54@georgetown.edu](mailto:els54@georgetown.edu)

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at:

<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help>.

**Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations:** Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical need and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out at: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/student-pregnancy>.