

J608 Ethics and Professional Practice  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30–10:45, Stauffer-Flint 2023

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**Office Hours**  
Tuesday 11–12:30  
Wednesday 1–2  
Thursday 11–12:30  
By appointment

### Course Description

Ethics for professionals examines the moral & ethical decision-making process for media practitioners. It has four themes:

1. Foundations: Philosophies and philosophers; morals, values, and principles
2. Reasoning with reality: Using decision models to resolve moral dilemmas
3. Dilemmas around us: Ethical challenges and conflicts in current events
4. Going forward: Your own ethical identity for the future

One concept I want you to come away with from this class is to understand the rationale of this statement: **There isn't an ethics of an act; there's only ethics — period.**

### Objectives

The exercises in this course, along with the reading and writing, will help you develop as a professional who can make decisions in the face of dilemmas. You will need to think critically, creatively and independently. You will become familiar with the language and customs of the profession, and learn to understand and when First Amendment principles and the law are appropriate considerations for ethical decision-making in professional practice, and when you will have to make tough decisions without these frameworks.

To achieve our goals, we will take on some interesting and tough issues. You will:

- Critically analyze philosophies, models, cases and ethics codes
- Recognize ethical issues, problems and dilemmas in all facets of communications
- Use problem-solving models effectively to resolve ethical dilemmas
- Think critically and clearly in applying models to case studies and current events
- Clearly and creatively present case studies and engage in debates
- Ground yourself in American media standards and practices
- Participate in class and group activities

Everyone must participate. You will be part of a group and will develop presentations for case studies. You will present an ethical dilemma to the class along with potential solutions. We will also discuss readings, various codes of ethics and current events—you need to be prepared to discuss the material of the day. Keep current with your reading for class and keep current with the news, locally and beyond.

I will call on students randomly and may have pop quizzes, so be prepared.

### Materials

The required book: Kidder, Rushworth M., *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*, 3rd edition (New York: Harper, 2009). When you read it, take notes and bring them to class.

We will also use the course book, uploaded to Blackboard, which was written by students who have taken the class: *Ethics and the Media* (Lawrence: William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, 2013). It has several case studies, and is a good reference guide as well.

Three case studies are pdf's uploaded to Blackboard.

If you have books, videos, movies or other content you think would interest the class, please let me know so we can incorporate them into the course.

Download class assignments from KU Blackboard. It will have links to PDF documents, websites, assignment sheets and other course material. Stay flexible: I may update the schedule as we move forward.

**Requirements**

**Group Work**

You will be assigned to a small group, or team. Each team will prepare an ethical dilemma from one the members find in the news, from a fictional depiction such as a movie, or from your own life. The schedule for these is on the course schedule (608 Schedule S20, on Blackboard). Plan to make time to meet with your group members in the days before your presentation.

Each group will also work together to make decisions about ethical dilemmas presented in class. You will take turns writing the document, but everyone will contribute to each discussion.

A group should not cut slack for slackers, and slackers shouldn't expect it. Each member of a group may anonymously evaluate the others, and themselves, for the contributions and participation, and may be factored in to your Presentation grade (see below).

**Attendance & Participation**

If you must miss class, notify me in advance with your reason—at least 30 minutes before class starts. If you haven't notified me and you are absent, your absence is unexcused, which has a penalty (explained in the next paragraph). Illness and bona fide emergencies count for an absence. On the other hand, vacations, leaving early for break (or coming back late), being unable to find parking and other reasons that are within your control are not acceptable, just as they wouldn't be on a job. I may require documentation for an absence, so if you're going to the doctor ask for a note; if you're at a funeral pick up a spare bulletin.

Each unexcused absence reduces your final grade by 1 percentage point. If you don't show up on a day when your group presents, you lose 5 points.

**Blackboard Discussion Board**

You will be required to post comments throughout the semester. I will start threads based on our class discussions, which you are required to participate in, so be prepared. If you don't know how, ask!

**Note on Social Media and Other Distractions**

Doing puzzles, watching a baseball game, texting friends or catching up on the news in class is unprofessional. Dozing off doesn't help your grade either. Take part in class. It will help your groups, improve your grade, and you'll learn something too.

If you're a digital addict, buy a legal pad and pen and take notes on paper. The amount you retain will amaze you. Scientific studies prove it!

**Grading and Assignments**

The course grade is intended as an evaluation of your performance over the semester. Keep track of your scores through the semester so you won't be surprised. The *quality* of your work will determine your grade — not the *quantity* of your effort.

<b>Points</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>This I Believe</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Presentation</b> Five points possible in each of five categories: identify a resolution principle; identify a paradigm; submit a paper on the project; include three questions for the class; total time, including discussion, about 10 minutes. Details on "Presentation Info."
<b>4</b>	<b>Discussion posts (4 posts, 1 point each)</b> Answer a question, posted on a Blackboard Discussion post, before each case study.
<b>16</b>	<b>Case study resolution (4 resolutions, 4 points each)</b> Each team will turn in one single-page resolution of about 300–400 words.
<b>30</b>	<b>Exams (2 exams, 15 points each)</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Final project</b> Five points possible in each of four categories: the dilemma; thoroughness; resolution; writing quality. Details on "Final Project."
<b>4</b>	<b>Presentation of and attendance at final project</b>
<b>100</b>	

**Course Schedule**

It is posted in the Syllabus & Schedule folder on Blackboard.

## The Fine Print

### Professionalism

**Attendance:** Arrive on time. In addition to its academic purpose, this class will be conducted like the professional environments where you may one day work.

Unexcused absences reduce your grade by one percentage point; see Attendance & Participation, p. 2.

If you're late, you get no extra time. Plan ahead for bad weather and limited parking. If you're absent, you don't get to make up any work missed in class, but you can keep up by getting notes from a classmate.

**Deadlines:** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period unless otherwise stated. You must attend class to turn in your work. If you do not, your work is counted late and will have half its points deducted. Assignments turned in more than 24 hours late will receive zero points.

Excuses don't count here any more than they count in a professional newsroom. No editor or producer will care if you say that:

- Your source (or classmate) didn't reply to an email or text
- Your printer/wifi/jump drive/car didn't work or your dog ate your mouse cord
- You found no place to park
- Lightning zapped your drive
- The shared printer is out of toner/offline/malfunctioning
- You forgot your deadline and Blackboard was offline

Each of these headaches has a simple way to prevent it: planning ahead. Now's the time to learn how to schedule yourself so you can take responsibility for your work.

**Discussions:** You are expected to share your ideas and listen to others' respectfully. Disagreements, which come naturally in any newsroom worth its salt, are perfectly acceptable when they are expressed professionally.

Here on a university campus, we believe that civility and respect for the opinions of others are very important in an academic environment. It is likely you may not agree with everything that is said or discussed in the classroom, but I still expect courteous behavior and responses no matter how you feel. When you disagree with someone, be sure that you make a distinction between criticizing an idea and criticizing the person. Expressions or actions that disparage a person's race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, gender identity/expression, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, or marital, parental, or veteran status are contrary to the mission of this course and will not be tolerated.

### Attendance: William Allen White School Policy

No student may add a journalism class after the 20th day of a semester.

Students must attend their classes and laboratory periods. Instructors may take attendance into account in assessing a student's performance and may require a certain level of attendance for passing a course. Instructors may choose to drop students from a course, based on attendance, without consent.

The School of Journalism and Mass Communications reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of students who fail to attend the first class or laboratory meeting.

### Plagiarism and Fabrication/Falsification Policy

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not tolerate plagiarism, fabrication of evidence and falsification of evidence. Penalties for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification can include a failing grade for the course and expulsion from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the professor of the course.

The following definitions are from Article II, Section 6, of the University Senate Rules and Regulations, revised FY98:

**Plagiarism:** Knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the information or ideas are common knowledge.

**Fabrication and Falsification:** Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

### Contacting me

Please come to my office for a visit. I'm just down the hall from our classroom, in Stauffer-Flint 207C. Steam Whistle and The Agency are on this floor, and the Kansas in right down the stairs. I've just moved in after the renovation, so I'm still figuring out where everything else is. If my office hours don't work for you, I will meet you when it's convenient for both of us. Just ask!

Calling, texting and emailing are fine too. But I may not reply after dinner time, so if you have a question about a paper or an assignment ask well ahead of the deadline. In other words, a lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

### Copying or Recording

Course materials prepared by the instructor, as well as content of all lectures presented by the instructor, are the instructor's property. Video and audio recording of lectures without my consent is prohibited. On request, the instructor usually will permit students to record lectures, on the condition that these recordings are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless the instructor gives explicit permission, recordings of lectures may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

### Financial Aid Policy

The KU Office of Student Financial Aid is required by they are enrolled. Instructors are required to report to that office absences of students who have stopped attending and names of those who have enrolled but never have attended. "Students who do not attend classes may be required to repay federal and/or state financial aid."

Students who receive any form of financial aid should learn all requirements including minimum hours

of enrollment and grades to qualify for and retain that aid.

**Misconduct**

You are bound by the university rules on academic misconduct. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating, it will behoove you to ask BEFORE your endeavor.

**Students with Special Needs**

The Office of Disability Resources (DR), 22 Strong Hall, (785) 864-2620 (V/TTY), coordinates accommodations and services for KU students with disabilities. If you have a disability for which you may request accommodation in KU classes and have not contacted DR, please do so as soon as possible. Please also contact me privately in regard to this course.

**Weapons Policy**

Individuals who choose to carry concealed handguns are solely responsible to do so in a safe and secure manner in strict conformity with state and federal laws and KU weapons policy. Safety measures outlined in the KU weapons policy specify that a concealed handgun:

- Must be under the constant control of the carrier, *pp. 11, 12*;
- Must be out of view, concealed either on the body of the carrier, or backpack, purse, or bag that remains under the carrier's custody and control;
- Must be in a holster that covers the trigger area and secures any external hammer in an un-cocked position;
- Must have the safety on, and have no round in the chamber.

No person shall use the fact or possibility that he or she is carrying a concealed weapon with the intent to intimidate another person except in defense of self or others.

Individuals who violate the KU weapons policy may be asked to leave campus with the weapon and may face disciplinary action under the appropriate university code of conduct.

*Tests and guns*

Instructors are allowed by Kansas Board of Regents policy to require backpacks, purses and other bags be placed in an area not directly next to students during exams, and as such those items would not be under the constant control of the individual. Students who choose to carry a concealed handgun in a purse, backpack or bag must review and plan each day accordingly, and are responsible for making alternative arrangements as necessary. The university does not provide appropriate secured storage for concealed handguns.

**Emergencies**

The Office of the Vice Provost for Student Success coordinates the University response to campus and individual student emergencies. The Office of the Vice Provost is also the contact when students are involved in a serious incident away from the Lawrence campus. The Office will offer information, counseling, and support to students, their families and others affected by the incident.

To report an extended illness or accident that keeps a student away from class, contact the **Academic Achievement and Access Center** at (785) 864-4064 and [www.achievement.ku.edu](http://www.achievement.ku.edu).