

Communication Studies 301

Ethics in Human Communication

Jeff Bineham
Office: Riverview 217
Phone: 308-3253

Email: bineham@stcloudstate.edu
Office hours: MWF 10-11, TR 11-12, or by
appointment

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2.

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all." Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1.

Texts

Zimbardo, Philip. The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil. New York: Random House, 2007.

The following required readings are in addition to the Zimbardo book. They are available through the D2L site for the course. I have listed the readings in the order in which we will read them.

Bineham, Jeffery L. "The Practice of Conversation." Unpublished essay.

Johannesen, Richard L. "Ethical Responsibility in Human Communication." Ethics in Human Communication. 5th ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2002.

Weaver, Richard M. "Language is Sermonic." Reading Rhetorical Theory. Ed. Barry Brummett. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2000. 774-784. The "Introduction to Richard Weaver" that precedes this essay was written by Barry Brummett.

Tierney, John. "For Good Self-Control, Try Getting Religious About It." The New York Times 30 December 2008: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/30/science/30tier.html>.

Pinker, Stephen. "The Moral Instinct." The New York Times Magazine 13 January 2008: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html>.

Wieman, Henry Nelson, and Otis M. Walter. "Toward an Analysis of Ethics for Rhetoric." Quarterly Journal of Speech 43 (1957): 266-270.

Brummett, Barry. "A Defense of Ethical Relativism as Rhetorically Grounded." Western Journal of Speech Communication. 45 (1981): 286-298.

Holt, Jim. "Good Instincts." The New York Times Magazine 9 March 2008: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/magazine/09wwln-lede-t.html>.

Burton, Robert. "The Certainty Epidemic." Salon 29 February 2008: http://www.salon.com/mwt/mind_reader/2008/02/29/certainty.

Cannon, Carl M. "Untruth and Consequences." The Atlantic Monthly January/February 2007:
<http://www.theatlantic.com/200701/cannon-lying>.

Fullinwider, Robert K. "Sissela Bok on lying and moral choice in private and public life - an amplification." The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education. 2007:
www.infed.org/thinkers/bok_lying.htm. Accessed 22 January 2009.

Booth, Wayne C. "Judging Rhetoric." The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004.

Schulman, Miriam. "Truth and Consequences." Issues in Ethics 10 (Spring 1999):
<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v10n1/truth.html>. Accessed 22 January 2009.

Mazur, Tim C. "Lying." Issues in Ethics Fall 1993:
<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v6n1/lying.html>. Accessed 23 February 2009.

I will also place some optional readings on the course D2L site, which will provide more detail and background on various topics we will discuss during the semester. I recommend that you read the optional readings, especially those that deal with topics you do not think you understand well or topics you would like to explore in more detail.

Course Objectives

Several basic assumptions will guide our study in this course. These are open to argument, but I assume that:

- all human action contains an ethical dimension;
- each choice we make when we act, and especially when we communicate, may be subject to ethical critique;
- a variety of ethical stances exist by which we might critique any particular communicative act; and
- the more we understand about ethics in general, the more intelligently we will be able to render specific ethical critiques.

With these assumptions in mind, we will work to accomplish four basic goals. By the end of the quarter we should be able:

1. To explain a variety of perspectives toward ethics in communication studies.
2. To articulate our own perspectives toward ethics and ethical judgments.
3. To recognize the ethical dimensions of the choices people make when they communicate.
4. To conduct ethical analyses of various forms of communication, including interpersonal communication, speeches, films, novels, socio-political movements, news reports, lectures, textbooks, or any other kinds of public communication.

Participation and Attendance (2 grades)

Education is a process of interactions about ideas. Its success cannot be measured solely by how much information one has learned. You must be in class to participate in the interactional process of education. You should think about the issues we cover, express your ideas in class, ask questions, and discuss the ideas raised by others. We learn from one another, and each of us has just as much responsibility to share our thoughts with others as we do to learn from what others say.

Some of the ideas we will read about and discuss are difficult. People faced with complex ideas often choose one of two options: they either give up, figuring that difficult material is not directly relevant to them and thus not worth their time and effort; or they work hard to understand as much as possible, and ask numerous questions about the rest. Take the second option. Class will be fun if you participate. It will be boring if you don't.

I will calculate your participation grade based on your contributions to in-class discussion and to the on-line bulletin board (available through the course D2L site). I will evaluate in-class discussion based upon my assessment of the quality and consistency of your contributions. You should come to class each day having read carefully the assigned reading and having prepared for discussion of that reading. You should bring the reading with you to class. You should have at least one opening question written down when you arrive at class to discuss a reading. I will evaluate the on-line bulletin board based on my assessment of the quality and consistency of your contributions. My hope is that everyone will contribute to each class session's discussion.

In general, I will consider attendance as part of your participation grade. However, eleven or more sessions absent is grounds for failure in the course. NOTE: For Tuesday-Thursday, evening, and summer classes every 50 minutes equals one class session.

Some considerations to remember:

- Respect the class time. Arrive early. Don't pack up to leave until class is over. If you must depart early on a given day you should sit by the door so you can exit without a disruption.
- Do not use cell phones, computers, or other electronic equipment while you are in class.
- In-class participation is public; refrain from private conversations, which distract people from what's going on in class.
- If you miss class, don't ask me what you missed. It's your responsibility to get notes and information from someone who was in class.
- If you need to contact me, please do so by email or leave a local phone number where you can be reached. In general, I do not return calls to long distance phone numbers.

Reports (2 grades)

You can do two types of reports in this class:

Communication Analysis Reports: In these reports you will describe a specific instance of communication and then use ideas from class to develop an ethical analysis of that communication. Your goal in these reports is to show how an understanding of ethics can help us to understand and to critique contemporary communication and/or contemporary events that are shaped by communication.

CMST Program Reports: In these reports you will relate ideas from this class to other courses in your Communication Studies program. Your goal is to demonstrate how specific ideas from this class relate to material you studied, or are studying, in another Communication Studies class. You could also trace an idea from this class through several other courses that you have taken. You must state clearly the source of the idea in this class and you must provide specific examples of how the idea informed your other class or classes.

Reports may be written or oral. A written report must be 2-3 pages long. An oral report must be 4-6 minutes long and should lead to class discussion of the topic. Reports must demonstrate communication skills befitting upper division work in Communication Studies. You can do reports in pairs if you want, in which case the length requirements double.

The grade you earn for your reports will be based on the number and quality of reports that you do. I will mark your reports with a "+" (meets all requirements), a "√" (does not meet all requirements but worthy of credit), or a "-" (fails to meet two or more requirements, or otherwise fails to meet the basic standards for a college class). See the [assessment sheet](#) for criteria.

The minimum accomplishments for each grade are as follows:

- A = 3 + reports, or 2 + reports and 2 √ reports (one report must be oral)
- B = 2 + reports, or 1 + reports and 3 √ reports
- C = 1 + and 1√ reports, or 3 √ reports
- D = 2 √ reports

You may submit only one report during each report period of the semester; those periods end on 9/17, 10/15, 11/10, and 12/17. Although you may submit or deliver reports at any time during a report period, you must schedule oral reports at least one week in advance (and to insure the availability of time to deliver your report, you should schedule them as far in advance as possible). You must do each type of report.

Take Home Exams (2 grades)

I will give three exams. I will distribute the exams via email: the first on September 29 with a due date of October 6, the second on November 17 with a due date of November 24, and the third on December 10 with a due date of December 17. All exams are due by 11:59pm, in the appropriate D2L dropbox, on the due dates.

These take home exams will cover reading and discussion material. I will base my evaluations of the exams on your ability to provide evidence that you have read the material thoroughly and thought carefully and critically about the issues discussed. In short, I will look for knowledge and analysis of the material. You should write your exams with the same care as papers. See the [Requirements for Papers](#) for expectations.

Your two best exam grades will count toward your final grade. This means that if you are satisfied with your first two exam grades, you do not need to take the third exam.

Papers (2 grades -- required only for students who decide to seek an A in the course)

The paper is required only of those who want to achieve an A in the course. To earn an A in the course you must write a 10-14 page paper and your final average score must fall within the A range. If you do not write a paper, the highest grade you can achieve is a B.

Those who opt to write the paper must submit a prospectus by November 5. You may, of course, submit the prospectus earlier (and I encourage you to do that), but if you do not submit a prospectus by November 5, you forfeit the option to write a paper. After you submit the prospectus, you will update me with weekly progress reports until the paper is completed. Final papers are due on December 10.

The prospectus should include: (1) a description of what you plan to do; be as detailed as possible and make sure to explain how your paper will focus on ethics and communication, (2) an explanation of why you think your paper is important; convince me that this is a worthwhile project for an ethics in communication class, and (3) an annotated bibliography of research you have done; by the time you write your prospectus, your work should be in progress. You are not bound to the details of your prospectus, but it should demonstrate that you have thought about and worked on your paper enough to complete it within the next month.

I can conceive of several different approaches you might take should you decide to write this paper. I will explain the approaches briefly here, but you are not limited to these. If you think of another approach, you should talk with me about it. You might find it useful to combine ideas from two or more approaches. I will be flexible about both your approach and your topic, provided that you (a) meet the deadlines for updates on your paper, (b) demonstrate consistent progress on your paper (don't surprise me on the due date with a paper you've told me nothing about), (c) construct an ethical analysis of communication, and (d) follow the guidelines stated in the requirements for papers.

Option one: You could write an ethical analysis of some specific instance of communication, like a speech, an editorial, a news report, a movie, a book, a web site, an organization's mission statement, etc. You might write about one of these instances of communication, for example, and examine the kinds of values it is based on or advocates, or the kinds of actions it encourages us to take. Perhaps the communication contains underlying implications for belief or behavior that are not stated explicitly. You could uncover such implications in your paper. Or you could discuss ethical choices made by the communicator(s) in the creation and delivery of the message.

Option two: You could focus on a specific issue or event and analyze communication about that issue or event. You might study how the news media (or a particular news outlet) have reported on health care reform, or how the mainstream press and the alternative press differ in their coverage of specific events in Iraq or Afghanistan. Your goal, as with option one, would be to explain the ethical dimensions of the communication. What kinds of perspectives does the discourse advocate? How does it advocate those perspectives? What kinds of implications for action and belief does the discourse contain?

Option three: You could write about communication that occurs in a discourse context that you have experienced or are currently experiencing. Such a discourse context could be work, family, military, school, living space, church, or any other context in which you regularly interact with a specific group of people who expect some degree of loyalty from one another. Your analysis would consider the ethical implications of the specific language system (clichés, stock phrases, coded words, euphemisms, etc.) that characterizes the discourse context. You might discuss how that language defines people, events, or tasks in particular ways, how that language defines loyalties, or how that language either reveals or conceals attitudes prevalent within the group. In sum, describe what you can learn about the ethics of a particular group by examining patterns of language use typical among group members.

Option four: You could examine ethical issues that arise within a particular genre (or type) of communication. You might examine the ethics of humor, for example, by writing about *The Daily Show* or a Michael Moore documentary. You could write about the ethics of profanity, or lying, or political spin. By what standards should we render judgments about these forms of communication? You could examine controversial forms of political communication (like flag burning) or religious communication (like evangelism or missionary work). Or you could discuss the ethical issues involved in laws about hate speech, censorship, or libel and slander. In any of these cases you would need to focus on specific examples of the type of communication in which you are interested.

Whichever option you choose, your paper should explore some ethical concerns about communication and render some ethical judgments of specific communication events based upon your own perspective toward ethics. Toward that end, I suggest the following organizational pattern for your papers (this is not a required pattern and ultimately you should organize your papers in a manner that is most suitable for your topic and purpose):

1. Introduction: discuss the relevance and importance of your topic, introduce key concepts, state your thesis, preview your paper.
2. Explanation of issue: introduce the communication you have studied and explain the problem that you want to examine in your paper; explain the ethical issues central to the problem; explain the importance of the problem and of the ethical issues both in general and for scholars of Communication Studies.

3. Ethical criteria: explain the ethical principles you will apply in your paper; explain why you have chosen these principles (provide an argument here; state the reasons you have selected these criteria).
4. Ethical critique: explain your judgments about the communication you have studied (apply the ethical criteria to the communication); explain the implications of your judgments for society in general, and for the study of ethics in Communication Studies.
5. Conclusion: summarize your work and emphasize your most important conclusions.

You should also familiarize yourself with the [Requirements for Papers](#) and make sure to meet the expectations stated in that document.

Each year the Department of Communication Studies awards the Kendall Ethics Award to the author of the best paper written about ethics and human communication. The award is a plaque and a \$250 prize. Any papers written for this class are considered for the award.

Grading

I define the letter grades as follows:

A = work that is excellent in every respect.

B = work that meets all basic requirements and is excellent in some respects.

C = work that meets the basic requirements in every respect.

D = work that deserves credit but does not meet the basic requirements.

Please note that to meet the basic requirements merits a C. A and B grades are reserved for work that exceeds basic requirements and achieves excellence in presentation, creativity, and/or intellectual accomplishment. Each letter grade earns points, based upon a four point scale:

A = 4.00	A- = 3.67	B+ = 3.33
B = 3.00	B- = 2.67	C+ = 2.33
C = 2.00	C- = 1.67	D+ = 1.33
D = 1.00	D- = .67	F = 0

Failure to complete any one activity, or failing grades on any two activities, are grounds for failure in the course. To compute your final grade I will figure the average of your scores and consider attendance. The range of scores for each grade is as follows:

A = 3.84 - 4.00	A- = 3.51 - 3.83	B+ = 3.17 - 3.50
B = 2.84 - 3.16	B- = 2.51 - 2.83	C+ = 2.17 - 2.50
C = 1.84 - 2.16	C- = 1.51 - 1.83	D+ = 1.17 - 1.50
D = .84 - 1.16	D- = .51 - .83	F = 0 - .50

Course Schedule

I will modify the schedule as needed during the semester.

<p>Aug. 25: Introductory stuff; Aug. 27: Read syllabus; Read Bineham</p> <p>Sept. 1: Read Zimbardo, preface & chapter 1 (read one chapter per week through Oct. 21)</p> <p>Sept. 3: Read Johannesen</p> <p><u>Absolutism</u> Sept. 8: Read Weaver Sept. 10: Read Tierney</p> <p>Sept. 15: Read Pinker Sept. 17: Report period 1 ends</p> <p><u>Relativism</u> Sept. 22: Read Wieman and Walter Sept. 24: Read Brummett, 286-293</p> <p>Sept. 29: Read Brummett, 293-298; Exam 1 distributed</p> <p>Oct. 1: Exam discussion day</p> <p>Oct. 6: Exam 1 due, 11:59pm in dropbox</p> <p><u>Egoism, Utilitarianism, Social Contract Theory</u> Oct. 8: Read Holt; Read Burton</p> <p>Oct. 14: Read Cannon Oct. 15: Read Fullinwider ; Report period 2 ends</p>	<p>Oct. 20: Read Booth Oct. 22: Fall Break, no class</p> <p>Oct. 27: Read Schulman; Read Mazur</p> <p><u>The Lucifer Effect</u> Oct. 29: Read Zimbardo, chapters 1-10</p> <p>Nov. 3: Read Zimbardo, chapter 11 Nov. 5: Paper prospectus due</p> <p>Nov. 10: Read Zimbardo, chapter 12; Report period 3 ends Nov. 12: No class</p> <p>Nov. 17: Exam 2 distributed Nov. 19: Exam discussion day</p> <p>Nov. 24: Exam 2 due , 11:59pm in dropbox Nov. 26: Thanksgiving Break, no class</p> <p>Dec. 1: Read Zimbardo, chapter 13 Dec. 3: Read Zimbardo, chapter 14</p> <p>Dec. 8: Read Zimbardo, chapter 15 Dec. 10: Read Zimbardo, chapter 16; Exam 3 distributed; papers due, 11:59pm in dropbox</p> <p>Dec. 17, 8am-10am (finals week class period): Report period 4 ends; Exam 3 due, 11:59pm in dropbox</p>
---	--