Media Law
J350F/J395 (Unique No. 08020/08205)
Fall 2017

Class: T & Th, 8 – 9:15 a.m., BMC 1.202
Professor: Robert Jensen
Office: BMC 3.304; 471-1990
Office Hours: Wednesday, 9:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m., and by appointment
Teaching Assistants’ Office Hours: by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Media Law is designed to (1) introduce students to First Amendment doctrines and
debates concerning freedom of expression, (2) explain applications of the law to the work of
journalists, and (3) engage students in a conversation about the ethical and political issues
facing the news media.

Students will learn to (1) place contemporary freedom-of-expression controversies in
philosophical and historical contexts to understand how legal doctrines have developed; (2)
use legal reasoning to predict how those doctrines would apply in new situations; (3) assess
the interests at stake in ethical controversies; and (4) use moral reasoning to apply ethical
guidelines in new situations.

Important Note about Computers: Students may not use computers, smartphones, or
other electronic devices during class except in cases involving special needs. See the
professor if you would like to make a request.

ATTENDANCE:
No attendance records will be kept. However, the exams and writing assignments in
the course will be based in large part on lectures and discussions, and it will be difficult to
earn a respectable grade without coming to class on a regular basis.

GRADES:
Your final grade will be based on:

--4 exams (15 points each) 60 points
--4 writing assignments (10 points each) 40 points

A- 90-93.5; A 94-100
B- 80-83.5; B 84-86.5; B+ 87-89.5
C- 70-73.5; C 74-76.5; C+ 77-79.5
D- 60-63.5; D 64-66.5; D+ 67-69.5
1. Exams:

There will be four exams during the semester, each worth 15 points toward your final grade. Each exam will be 30 questions, multiple-choice and true/false. So, each correct answer will be worth a half point toward your final grade. Each exam will cover material from the lectures and readings for a single segment of the course; exams will not be comprehensive. There is no final exam.

2. Writing assignments:

There will be four writing assignments during the semester, each worth 10 points toward your final grade.

On the Tuesdays marked on the schedule I will give you an assignment based on the material covered in recent lectures, discussions, and readings. Each assignment will include two questions, one legal and one ethical. You will write one page on each question, to be turned in the following Tuesday in class. Bring the assignment to class. Do not email assignments to the professor or a TA unless there’s an emergency that prevents you from coming to class. If that happens, contact the professor as soon as possible.

Your answers must be double-spaced on no more than two pages (one page on the legal question and one on the ethical question). Don’t write more than that; we will not read beyond two pages. Use 1-inch margins, 12-point type, and the Times New Roman font. Put your name, eid, and the assignment number at the top of each page and staple them together. Do not use a title page. Do not use colored paper. Do not use exotic fonts. Do not use a paper clip.

No extra research beyond the readings and information provided in class is necessary to write these assignments. Do not use footnotes. Mention court cases if they are relevant, but you need not provide formal citations for cases.

Answer the question in your own words. In formulating your answer, you may talk with others. But the final answer and writing must be your own. Plagiarism—of published material or another student's work—will be punished in accordance with university regulations.

Your assignments will be graded on form and content. No late work will be accepted. If special circumstances arise, contact the professor (not one of the TAs) as soon as possible.

Keep copies of all assignments you turn in and keep your graded assignments until the end of the semester. A lot of paper changes hands in a class this large, and sometimes papers get lost. If there are discrepancies between our records and yours, you need to have your papers to help us resolve the problem.

If you don’t think your grade on an assignment is fair, you can ask for an explanation. The first step is to talk with the TA who graded your paper within one week after the assignment is returned. If you want a formal re-evaluation of your grade, write a short (one paragraph to one page) explanation of why you think a higher grade is warranted. Be specific. If you can’t work it out with the TA, ask the professor to resolve the dispute. If you wait longer than a week, we will not review your paper. Papers cannot be rewritten for a higher grade.
TEXTBOOKS:


OTHER READINGS:


UNIVERSITY POLICIES and INFORMATION

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student’s learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Religious Holy Days: A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at ssd@austin.utexas.edu; (512) 471-6259 (voice); or (512) 410-6644 (videophone). http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/

Helpful UT Resources:

Sanger Learning Center: https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc
Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling: https://ugs.utexas.edu/vick
Undergraduate Writing Center: http://uwc.utexas.edu/
Public Speaking Center, https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc/support/speaking-center
Counseling & Mental Health Center: http://emhc.utexas.edu/
Student Emergency Services: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/
SCHEDULE  
J350F/Fall 2017  
(Chapters refer to The Law of Journalism and Mass Communication)

WEEK 1: August 31  
topic: law, justice, and the U.S. legal system  
reading: Chapter 1, Kerr

WEEK 2: September 5 and 7  
topic: free speech basics: sedition, prior restraint  
reading: Chapter 2

WEEK 3: September 12 and 14  
* distribute writing assignment #1 on Tuesday  
topic: categories of speech  
reading: Chapter 3

WEEK 4: September 19 and 21  
*writing assignment #1 due on Tuesday*  
topic: ethics basics  
reading: SPJ codes of ethics (http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp)

WEEK 5: September 26 and 28  
*exam #1 on Tuesday*  
topic: libel  
reading: Chapter 4

WEEK 6: October 3 and 5  
topic: libel, cont.  
reading: Chapter 5

WEEK 7: October 10 and 12  
*distribute writing assignment #2 on Tuesday*  
topic: privacy and the press  
reading: Chapter 6

WEEK 8: October 17 and 19  
*writing assignment #2 due on Tuesday*  
topic: ethical thinking  
reading: Weston book
WEEK 9: October 24 and 26
*exam #2 on Tuesday*

distribute writing assignment #3 on Tuesday
  topic: access to information
  reading: Chapter 7, Texas Open Meetings and Public Information acts online (links below)

WEEK 10: October 31 and November 2
*writing assignment #3 due on Tuesday*
  topic: free press/fair trial
  reading: Chapter 9

WEEK 11: November 7 and 9
  topic: journalists’ privilege
  reading: Chapter 8

WEEK 12: November 14 and 16
  distribute writing assignment #4 on Tuesday
  topic: anonymous sources
  reading: SPJ (http://www.spi.org/ethics-papers-anonymity.asp); Online News Association
(http://www.ethics.journalists.org/topics/confidential-sources/); NY Times
*exam #3 on Thursday*

WEEK 13: November 21
*writing assignment #4 due on Tuesday*
  topic: copyright; advertising; corporations and corporate speech
  reading: Chapters 12 and 13
*no class Thursday*

WEEK 14: November 28 and 30
  topic: broadcasting and cable regulation
  reading: Chapters 10

WEEK 15: December 5 and 7
  topic: cyberspace; obscenity/pornography
  reading: Chapters 11
*exam #4 on Thursday*

*There is no final exam in this class.*
Useful web sites
Texas Open Meetings Act
http://foift.org/resources/texas-open-meeting-act/

Texas Public Information Act
http://foift.org/resources/texas-public-information-act/

Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas
http://foift.org/

Society of Professional Journalists
https://www.spj.org/

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
http://www.rcfp.org/

Committee to Protect Journalists
http://www.cpj.org/

Student Press Law Center
http://www.splc.org/

Legal Information Institute
http://www.law.cornell.edu/

Oyez Project (U.S. Supreme Court news and links)
http://www.oyez.org/

U.S. Press Freedom Tracker
https://pressfreedomtracker.us/

Ethics codes online
Ethical Journalism Network
http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/en

Associated Press Managing Editors
http://www.apme.com/?page=EthicsStatement

Radio Television Digital News Association
http://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics#.VXnxZoasiFx

National Press Photographers Association
https://nppa.org/code_of_ethics

American Society of Magazine Editors
http://www.magazine.org/asme/editorial-guidelines

American Society of Business Publication Editors
http://www.asbpe.org/guide-to-preferred-editorial-practices

National Association of Science Writers
https://www.nasw.org/nasw-code-ethics

Society for News Design
http://www.snd.org/about/code-of-ethics/

Public Relations Society of America
http://apps.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/ethics/codeenglish/