**Communication Ethics**

SH 358-50; Tu 7:00-9:30 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. William W. Neher

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**Course Description**: The study of perspectives and theories concerning ethical standards for communication. Students are introduced to various systematic approaches for dealing with ethical issues, problems, or dilemmas, especially in regard to interpersonal communication and informative and persuasive discourse.

Quintilian held that the ideal of rhetoric (effective communication) is characterized as the good person speaking well. Aristotle held that the character of the speaker (the communicator) might just be the most important element in influencing others. The ability to think critically about the ethics of one’s own communication and that of others represents one of the highest aims of liberal education.

**Course Objectives**: To lead students to do the following:

1. Identify ethical issues associated with various communication acts and settings.
2. Demonstrate awareness of systems of thought that allow people to deal with ethical questions in communication.
3. Show knowledge of major theorists and theories relevant to ethics of communication.
4. Articulate their own ethical assumptions when communicating or evaluating the communication of others.

5. Demonstrate ability to employ critical reasoning concerning ethical issues and dilemmas:

* Identify the ethical issues in a communication event or case.
* State the relevant facts and assumptions bearing on these issues.
* Formulate ethical principles and reasoning appropriate to these issues.
* Propose a course of action reasonably based on the reasoning.

6. Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the ethics of a given message or communication interaction or event, whether enacted by themselves or others. Be able to explain or defend their evaluations to others.

**Text and required readings**:

Neher & Sandin (2006). *Communicating Ethically: Character, Duties, Consequences & Relationships,* Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Other readings as assigned from Blackboard or library.

**Assignments and Evaluation**:
Quizzes over text materials 30%
Oral Examination 10%
Ethics project, written portion 10%

Project presentation 10%
Class participation, leadership 10%
Responses (weekly journal writes) 20%

Final Paper: Personal Code 10%
Total: 100%

Note: This course is supported by the Blackboard system. Students must check the Blackboard page for this course on a regular basis, preferably daily, to keep up with announcements, assignments, readings, and similar course information.

**Schedule of classes and assignments**. All students are expected to have completed the assigned readings and journal writes before the class meeting of the assigned date. After missing two such journal writes, grade for class responses will be lowered one letter grade. Journals writes are to represent thoughtful reflections and reactions to class discussions and reading materials.

Calendar for SH 358. Communication Ethics.

(1) Week One. 9/1.. Introductions. Read Chapter 1 before class. View the “The Emperors’ Club" in class; discussion (viewing depends on class meeting times; can be done out of class).

(2) Week Two. 9/8.. Ethics of Rhetoric and Persuasion; Virtue ethics: Chapter 2 of Neher & Sandin. See Blackboard readings from Plato. Respond to Plato’s claims that rhetoric is inherently unethical.

(3) Week Three. 9/15. Is lying always wrong? Read Neher & Sandin, Chapter 3; List as many situations as you can in which lying would be the “right thing to do.” Class discussion of lying and types of lies. Team Presentation.

(4) Week Four. 9/22. Ends and Means: Chapter 4 of Neher and Sandin. Should everyone be treated the same? If people buy into the contract, are they accepting the consequences of “the game?” How do you separate your own character from the role you are playing? See Blackboard on Peter Singer, John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon. Team Presentation.

(5) Week Five. 9/29. Is dialogic ethics the answer for communicators? Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 5. Is it possible to live up to the standards of Buber, Levinas, and Freire? Should teachers in their communication with students strive to be like Paulo Freire? Team Presentation.

(6) Week Six. Oct.6. Are these modern times or what? How can we be in post-modern times? Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 6. Why do some feminists reject the theories of ethics we have studied so far? Can an ethics of care be applied in real-life cases? Is it ever OK under certain circumstances to violate rights? Team presentation.

Review of theories; Preparation for oral exams (includes practice group exams); discussion of final projects.

(7) Week Seven. Oct. 13. Group oral exams. (Examination One).

(8) Week Eight. Oct. 20. The ethics of interpersonal communication and intercultural communication—how are we to treat others? What are the limits of our understanding and respects for others (if any)? Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 7-9. Team Presentation.

(9) Week Nine. Oct. 27. Mass media—what ethics can and do apply? Do codes rule or are there binding philosophical ethical standards? Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 10. Also, recall the view of Aristotle and the virtues of the classical rhetor. Do they apply in mass communication? Team Presentation.

(10) Week Ten. Nov. 3. Is the term, “Political communication ethics,” truly an oxymoron? What ethical standards can be applied for political campaigners, consultants, and lobbyists? Is “spin” ethical as long as everyone understands that what it is? Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 11. Team Presentation.

(11) Week Eleven. Nov. 10. Ethical communication in organizations: do organizations have ethical responsibilities? What are individuals’ responsibilities for organizational decisions and messages? Read Neher & Sandin, Ch. 12.

(12) Week Twelve. Nov. 17. Ethics and the “new communication media.” Do traditional ethical theories provide a basis for understanding the “new media” and their effects? Is all new media part of the “post-modern world?” Read Neher and Sandin, Chapter 13. Team Presentation.

(13) Week Thirteen. Dec. 1. Final group presentations. See Ch. 14, Capstone.

(14) Week Fourteen. Dec. 8. Final group presentations.

**Final Projects**

Students select an area of interest involving ethics of communication. Presentations are given for individual grade, but the evening of presentation will be based on teams of presenters. At the time of the in-class, students submit a paper based on the in-class project, described below.

Projects are organized under the following topic areas:

 Political Communication

 Communication and Diversity

 Religious Communication

 Health Communication

 Interpersonal Communication

 Web/technological issues of communication

 Other as suggested by class

Presentation: 15-20 minutes; can use a variety of presentational methods, including movie clips, power point, dialogue, role play, case study, combination.

Paper should include the following elements:

1. Describe the nature of the issue or problem studied (include research on the area or problem; include sources).
2. Demonstrate a well-considered understanding of the ethical issues involved, applying one or more ethical systems developed during the course.
3. Make recommendations for ethically dealing with the area or problem.
4. Due: at the time of the in-class presentation.

**Final Paper: A Code of Personal Communication Ethics**. Develop and defend your own ethics of communication at this stage of your life and career. Explain what elements in the course or readings led you to the development or refinement of this personal ethical system. Due: last meeting of the class.

**Attendance Policy**: Constructive and effective class participation will be considered in final grade determination; similarly, excessive absences (over three), will weigh negatively on final grade.

t is the policy and practice of Butler University to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Written notification from Student Disability Services is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with your instructor and provide one week of notice. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that the accommodation can be made on a timely basis. If you have questions about Student Disability Services, please contact Michele Atterson, Jordan Hall, Room 136, ext. 9308.

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