Course Syllabus

MCM 306.001

Media Law

Spring 2020

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Office Hours: 2-4 p.m. Tuesday and by appointment
Department: Mass Communication
Class meeting time and place: 9-9:50 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Boynton 104

Course Description: Communication Law. Study of communication law affecting the rights and duties of the press, including electronic media. Attention given to the First Amendment, libel, privacy, Freedom of Information Act, copyright and obscenity. Prerequisite: advanced standing.

Justification for Credit Hours Awarded: MCM 306, “Media Law” (3 credits), typically meets three times each week (Monday/Wednesday/Friday) in 50-minute segments for 15 weeks and also meets for a 2-hour final examination. Students have significant textbook reading assignments and are expected to take 3 one-hour exams and a final based on reading assignments, lectures, videos, etc. In addition, one paper—either a book review or a brief based on a media-law case—is assigned. These activities average at minimum 6 hours of work each week to prepare outside of classroom hours.

Program Learning Outcomes:

1. Students majoring in journalism should be able to recognize the role and function of media in society.
2. Students majoring in journalism will be able to demonstrate understanding of legal and ethical principles relating to media.

**Journalism Concentration PLOs:**

1. Demonstrate appropriate writing and editing skills across diverse multimedia platforms.
2. Gather, analyze, organize and synthesize information on contemporary topics to develop a news story.
3. Demonstrate the application of contemporary technology, terminology and techniques in the news-gathering process.
4. Understand effective visual language and how to apply it to convey messages and enhance the communication process.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students will be introduced to the major areas of media law: libel, privacy, fair trial-free press conflicts, confidentiality, access, obscenity, broadcast law, advertising law and copyright. Landmark court cases will be emphasized.
2. Students will learn the importance of the First Amendment in media law.
3. Students will obtain an understanding of the U.S. legal system.
4. Students will learn why it is important to consider ethical issues related to media law.


**Course Requirements:** Requirements include three one-hour examinations, a book review and a semi-comprehensive final.

**Considerations:**

1. **Major exams and the final** will cover material discussed in class, along with handouts, assigned chapters in text, etc. You may expect all types of questions, including short answer and essay. A number of questions will be based on information found in the text but **not** discussed in class. 306 is a rigorous course. To receive maximum
reward (a good grade), maximum effort is required. Generally, I lecture the entire period.

2. Information will be forthcoming on the book review.

3. The semi-comprehensive final will include everything since the third exam plus review material. A handout containing review questions will be distributed after the third test.

4. Students will be notified of grades on major exams. Anyone who wishes to look at his/her exam may do so in my office.

5. Plagiarism may be defined as “literary theft.” It is a type of cheating that includes copying another person’s wording without writing a citation and/or taking another person’s ideas without writing a citation. It can result in disciplinary action, an automatic F in this course, etc.

6. I do not email grades or give them out on the telephone.

Course Calendar: attached.

Grading Policy:
Three major one-hour exams = 60%
Book review = 15%
Semi-comprehensive final = 25%

Attendance Policy:

1. No distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences. Any student who misses 25% of the class will have his/her grade lowered one letter; 35%, two letters; 45%, three letters, etc.

2. Three tardies count as one absence. (Please see me the period you are late if you believe your tardy should be excused.) If you come in 15 minutes or later after the class has begun, you are absent. But I reserve the right to lock doors 5 minutes after class has begun.

Academic Integrity (A-4.1): Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.
Definition of Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one’s own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper without giving the author due credit.

Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54): Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

Students with Disabilities: To obtain disability accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disability services/.

Additional Considerations:

1. Early tests (major exams, final) will not be given.
2. No one is exempt from the final.
3. I have absolutely no problems with students recording lectures. In fact, given the bulk of the material, I recommend it.
4. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed. Please do not ask me to lend you my notes. Find another student who is willing to do this.

5. As previously noted, 306 is a rigorous course. This is college, everyone!! I don’t tell you what to study. That is your responsibility.

6. Students are expected to conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen. Such behavior as playing video games, doing online shopping, whispering, talking, reading, studying material for another class, etc., will not be tolerated. The above are grounds for dismissal. Students also are expected to remain in their seats throughout the period unless there is a dire emergency, which should be explained at the end of the period. Leaving the classroom, returning and not explaining why will result in an absence for that period.

7. Texting (text messaging) during class is crude, rude and socially unacceptable. Anyone caught during this will be asked to leave and possibly will be dropped from the class. The same holds true for sending and checking emails.

8. Cell phones—or anything that looks like a cell phone, for that matter—should be clearly placed out of sight, especially during tests. If a student is caught with a cell phone on his/her desk, she/he will be asked to leave the classroom. If this should occur during a test, he/she will receive a zero on the test. Please turn off all cell phones.

9. Course feedback is provided throughout the semester: exam grades are posted.

10. Makeup exams are given only to students who have acceptable excuses. (“Acceptable” is defined by the instructor.) One makeup exam will be given at the end of the semester. It will cover the entire semester’s work and will consist of items to define and identify, short-answer questions and essays.

11. Children are not welcome in this class, which in no way functions as a day-care center. Anyone who brings a child to class will be asked to leave with the child. On the other hand, cats and dogs are very, very welcome, although, alas, university policy does not permit them.

***Outlines: Students receive “outlines” to help them spell words, etc. In no way is an outline a complete study guide. Many, many points will be
discussed that are not included on outlines. In 306, you will be held responsible for all lecture notes!!
READING ASSIGNMENTS

Note: Please read entire chapters unless otherwise noted.

TEST 1:

Chapter 1: "The Rule of Law": pp. 3-34.
Chapter 2: "The First Amendment."
Chapter 3: "Speech Distinctions."

TEST 2:

Chapter 4: "Libel and Emotional Distress"
Chapter 5: "Libel"*
Chapter 6: "Protecting Privacy."

TEST 3:

Chapter 8: "Overseeing the Courts": entire chapter, which also includes material on "Confidentiality*"
Chapter 10: "Obscenity and Indecency."
FINAL EXAMINATION:


Chapter 12: “Advertising.”

TENTATIVE DISCUSSIONS

Please note the word “tentative.” These are subject to change.


Mon., Feb. 24-Fri., Feb. 28: “Privacy.”

Mon., March 2-Fri., March 6: Test 2. “Fair Trial-Free Press Conflicts.”

Spring Break.


Mon., April 13-Fri., April 17: “Broadcast Law.”


Mon., April 27-Fri., May 1: “Copyright.”

Finals.