

COMMUNICATIONS LAW *Communication 5650*

Course Description: COMM 5650 (3) Communications Law

An in-depth examination of the legal and ethical impact of new technologies on mass media involving lecture, discussion, extensive reading and writing assignments.

Special needs:

Any student who has a condition which may affect their performance in any way is encouraged contact the Coordinator of Disability Services at 931.221.6230 (TTY phone 931.221.6278) to discuss the matter. The fax number is 931.221.7102. The Disability Services office is located in the Clement Building, in room 140.

Method of Instruction:

This course is based upon the case study method. Court opinions will be supplemented with material posted or linked by the professor. Students will conduct research on an assigned legal topic, and participation in discussion board activities is required.

Required Text:

There is **no required textbook** for this course. All materials come from online sources.

As a graduate level communications law course, it is presumed the student has taken a media law at the undergraduate level. This means you should have a basic knowledge of the American legal system, an understanding of legal language and its importance as well as general concepts of media law. A lack of a media law class at the undergraduate level is not an impediment to success in this course. It can, however, make grasping some of the concepts more difficult.

If you have not had media law at the undergraduate level you may wish to obtain a supplemental text for reference purposes. The text used in our undergraduate course is *Mass Media Law*, by Don R. Pender & Clay Calvert, 17th edition.

There will be one specific discussion board designated as a 'question' board. The purpose of this board is to all students to ask the professor questions about course content or concepts. Most questions are answered within 24 hours. Please keep in mind, however, the question board is to be used to ask your professor questions and not as a class discussion board.

General Academic Goals:

Pursuant to the general objective of the University, this course should assist each student in developing, at an appropriate level:

1. skills of inquiry, abstract and logical thinking and critical analysis;

2. literacy in writing and reading;
3. an awareness of systems of values as bases for fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society;
4. an understanding of human behavior and skills necessary for appropriate social interaction;
and,
5. a concentration in a discipline in order to enter a chosen profession, undertake advanced study or develop an avocation.

Specific Academic Goals:

In addition to the general academic goals, students in this course are expected to:

1. further their understanding of the American system of law as it relates to the field of mass communication;
2. develop or enhance their understanding of the First Amendment protections for speech and the press as well as its application to contemporary problems;
3. increase their knowledge and awareness of selected issues in communications law such as prior restraint, libel, invasion of privacy, and copyright, and how such issues are impacted by the development of new technologies.

Caveats:

Time is of the essence. As Jerry Reed once sang "there's a long way to go and a short time to get there..." Most of you are keenly aware of that at this stage of your Master's course work. Even so, it's important to remind you of the accelerated nature of the course.

On-line learning is very much like an independent study course in the sense it is easy to put off the assigned work expecting to catch-up "next week." If you get behind, it will be very difficult to "catch-up." Do not procrastinate. Set a specific schedule for working on this, or any other on-line course.

Whether this is your first or fifth on-line course, keep in mind that the D2L does offer support services. If you run into a technical problem, please be sure to use the services of the HELP Desk.

Each student should be in the habit of logging onto the D2L frequently to check for any announcements which have been posted. Each student should also be sure their address in the D2L e-mail system is accurate, and *regularly check for e-mail messages* related to this course. It is also important to know the e-mail system in D2L is the official means of e-mailing between online students and professors.

When sending e-mail, please remember to include a subject statement which will help identify you as a member of this class. Due to the unfortunate and on-going problem with e-mails containing a virus or other malicious components, any e-mails without a subject statement will be subject to automatic deletion.

Attendance & Participation:

As an on-line course, attendance and participation consists timely involvement in discussion board activity as well as the timely completion of assigned tasks. There will be two types of class discussion boards; what I call a standard board and a news board. Requirements and responsibilities differ.

A *standard discussion board* will have some amount of background information or a 'set-up' followed by specific questions. Each student will be required to post an original response to the question, then make a substantive reply to the original posting of *at least* three other students; hence the concept of a discussion. Furthermore, each student is required to read all posted comments and replies. Students are expected to remain engaged in the discussion until the board is closed.

News boards on the other hand are based on current events related to or impacting communication law and technology. When there is a news board assignment you will find a document in the content area with the name of the particular board (e.g. "Now the news..."). This document will contain links to approximately 10 current or recent news stories (print or video) from online sources.

You are required to read all linked stories. You will then select one of the stories and compose an original posting explaining why you found that story the most interesting, compelling, relevant, or perhaps disturbing. Replies to the comments of other students are permissible but not required on news boards with the exception of any question I pose directly to you. But remember, as with all discussion boards, you are required to read all posting

What follows are general rules for our discussion board activities:

First of all, when I pose a question, be sure that you answer the question being asked. When asked to explain why you do or do not agree with a particular principle, provide supporting information not mere opinion. An opinion presented without a basis of support is as valuable as free legal advice. While some professors may require students to research discussion board topics and post links to sources retrieved there is no such requirement in this course. However, you are expected to provide a basis or justification for your posted opinions.

Second, as a standard practice I advise composing any and all postings or responses to the postings of others in a word processing software. Then use the copy/paste feature to post your comments.

This is a graduate communication course. Your postings should be thoughtful, well-composed, and free of unnecessary mistakes in grammar. This criterion applies as much to discussion board activity as it does case briefs and research papers; sloppy work will be graded as such.

Third, while it is perfectly acceptable to agree to disagree with the opinion or supporting evidence used by another member of this class, discourteous comments or criticism direct towards another member of the class are *unacceptable*. All class members are expected to remain respectful and courteous in our discussions, and are responsible for their postings.

Finally, please be considerate of your classmate's time. Be as specific and concise in your responses as possible. Stay focused on the question or issue at hand, and do not include material which is either unnecessary or irrelevant to the discussion.

Grading Procedures:

All assigned material is subject to use for purposes of exams. Be sure to check for announcements, e-mail and assignments on a regular basis.

Discussion Board	200
Research Paper	300
Two exams; 250 pt. Ea.	<u>500</u>
TOTAL:	1000 pts.

Final grades will be determined on the basis of a standard 90-80-70 scale and determined on the basis of all points attained as of the end of the course. Exams will be in essay format and will not be given early.