

The University of Puerto Rico  
College of Humanities  
English Department  
Rio Piedras Campus

**I. Course title:**

Communication Ethics / Spring 07-08  
INGL 3287, (3 credits/ 45 hours)  
Class Meeting: M-W 1:00-2:20pm LPM 307

**II. Contact info:**

Professor Mirerza González  
Office: 8 Sótano PED  
Office hours: M-W-F 10:00-11:00am  
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**III. Course Description:**

This course provides an examination of the nature and function of ethics in human communication. "Communication ethics is now a mainstream point of discussion in politics, the media and in private corporations. In each of these traditional communication venues, understanding the deeper moral requirements of communication is now seen as an essential means to balance human wellbeing and group care in rapidly changing world circumstances." (2006, The Institute of Communication Ethics, Australia)

**IV. Course Objectives:** In this class students will:

- \* develop awareness of the importance of communication ethics in the promotion of social justice, information integrity, organizational trust, group care and individual well-being;
- \* differentiate universal and situational approaches to ethics;
- \* understand and describe the five major approaches to communication ethics: political, human nature, dialogical, situational, and religious position;
- \* identify and discuss ethical questions that arise when informing, persuading and entertaining;
- \* assess how historical contexts, cultural values and notions of otherness (class, gender, race, sexual identity and politics of representation) influence ethical choices during communicative interactions.

## V. Class Materials:

### 1. Textbook

Johannesen, R.L. (2002). *Ethics in Human Communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

### 2. Course pack

PromolImage, RP

### Additional class materials

1. Bok, S. (1979). *Lying*. New York: Vintage Books

2. Reference materials:

- a. Casuistry : <http://personal.tcu.edu/~pking/COMM40213/casuistry.html>
- b. APA Style Publication Manual
- c. Case Studies

## VI. Grading (methods of evaluation):

Your final grade will be composed of:

1. 25% One written examination (100 pts.)
2. 25% Final paper (100 pts.)
3. 25% One book report (100 pts.)
4. 12.5% Journal (50 pts.)
5. 12.5% Attendance (50 pts.)

### Grading System (400 points scale):

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Above 354 pts. | A |
| 353-318 pts.   | B |
| 317-280 pts.   | C |
| 279-240 pts.   | D |
| Below 239 pts. | F |

\*\*\*\*\*Students with special needs will be graded accordingly.

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CLASS ATTENDANCE (50 PTS):

1. As this is a course in which theoretical knowledge and critical thinking abilities are being developed, attendance to class is MANDATORY. Violation of this policy will seriously affect your academic standing in the course.
2. Anyone absent to more than (4) class meetings without being excused by the Instructor will fail automatically (☹ = F). Whenever possible, please notify your instructor of any absences ( medical conditions or any other reasons) in advance.
3. Messages for your instructor can be left at the instructor's mailbox or sent via email to: [englishmqv@yahoo.com](mailto:englishmqv@yahoo.com).
4. NO EXAM REPOSITIONS – NO INCOMPLETES.

## VII. Students Rights & Responsibilities

### 1. Grievances

Students with a grievance against another student in this class or students with a conflict with the instructor are referred to the grievance procedures outlined in the Student Handbook. It says, in part, "in academic matters such as a grade complaint, the student should first speak with his or her professor. The normal hierarchy then leads to the department chairperson, dean of the college, and provost."

### 2. Cheating & Plagiarism

Students are reminded that cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Even one incident of cheating or plagiarism is grounds for failing the course or more serious action by the university. Please study carefully the University policies on cheating and plagiarism that are detailed in the UPR Student Handbook.

**3. Special accommodations (Law 51):** For those students who are registered with the Rehabilitation Services Administration or students who are in need of special accommodations, please let me know on the first day of class. Possible arrangements dealing with assistive technology or equipment you may need should be coordinated through the Disability Services Office (OAPI) of the UPR-RRP, Dean of Students Affairs.

Below, you will find the class schedule and assignment due dates. This is SUPERimportant. Do NOT lose this syllabus!

### CLASS SCHEDULE (due to changes)

| <i><b>Date of Class</b></i>     | <i><b>Class Topic</b></i>            | <i><b>Journal entry</b></i>  | <i><b>Important Concepts</b></i>  | <i><b>Tasks</b></i>   |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Week One<br>Jan. 21             | Introduction to course               |  |   | Review of syllabus and list of class materials  |
| Week Two<br>Jan. 26-28          | Defining Communication Ethics        | Write down and discuss the definition of these terms: *Communication<br>*Ethics<br>*Casuistry                  | Ethics<br>Moral Reasoning<br>Ethical dilemma<br>Stakeholders<br><br>Casuistry<br><br>Accountability | Read: "The Practical Philosophy of Communication Ethics and Free Speech as the Foundation for Speech Communication" by Ronald C. Arnett |
| Week Three<br>Feb. 2-4<br><br>& | Moral Theories and Moral Reasoning I | Following class discussion define:<br>1. Judeo-Christian Golden Rule<br>2. Virtue<br>3. Categorical Imperative |   | Presentation about Moral Theories<br><br>Read: Methods of Reasoning in Ethics: KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT                   |

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|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Week Four<br>Feb. 9-10-11       |  | 4. Original position and Justice as fairness<br>5. Ethics as Care<br>6. Social contract (the Law)          |  | Read: Rawls' "The Main Idea of the Theory of Social Justice"                     |
| Week Five<br>Feb. 16-18         | Moral Theories and Moral Reasoning I<br><br>16-NO CLASS  | Compare and contrast Universal vs. Situational theories  | Universalism vs. situationalism  | Read: "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?" by, James Rachels (2003)                 |
| Week Six<br>Feb. 23-25          | Information, communication and freedom of speech         | Discuss: The challenges that HATE SPEECH posits to Communication Ethics                                    | Information vs. Communication<br><br>Communicating the Truth/truths<br><br>Freedom of Speech | Read: "The Ethics of Being in a Communication Context" by Clifford G. Christians |
| Week Seven<br>March 2-4         | The principles of Human Communication Fairness and Truth | 2 March (Monday)<br>Due date to turn in Journals<br><br>2 March Exam #1                                    | 4 March<br>Movie: The Dark Knight  |  |
| Week Eight<br>March 9-11        | Five approaches to Communication Ethics                  | Case Studies:<br>Discuss<br>A. Richard Nixon's April 1972 speech<br>B. George Bush's                       | Political perspectives<br><br>Human Nature   | Read Chapter 2 Johannesen<br><br>Read Chapter 3 Johannesen                       |
| Week Nine<br>March 16-18        | Theories on Communication Ethics                         |  | Dialogical Perspective   | Read Chapter 4 Johannesen  |
| Week Ten<br>March 23-25         | Theories on Communication Ethics                         |  | Situational Perspective  | Read Chapter 5 Johannesen  |
| Week Eleven<br>March 30-April 1 | APRIL'S FOOL AWAY – NYU CONFERENCE                       |  | Religious  | Read Chapter 6 & 8 Johannesen<br><br>Read: Lying                                 |
| Week Twelve<br>April 6-8        | NO CLASS<br>HOLY WEEK                                    | NOTE: 15- Due date<br>Book report: Sissela Bok's <u>Lying</u><br><br><u>NO LATE WORKS WILL BE ACCEPTED</u> | 8 April:<br><br>15- Due date<br>Book report: Sissela Bok's <u>Lying</u>                      | Read: Lying<br>15- Due date<br>Book report: Sissela Bok's <u>Lying</u>           |

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| Week<br>Thirteen<br>April 13-15          | The Ethics of<br>telling the truth<br>Interpersonal<br>Communication &<br>Public Speaking                        | Answer:<br>Is telling "the truth"<br>always "ethically"<br>correct?   | Truth vs. truthfulness   | Lying by Sissela Bok  |
| Week<br>Fourteen<br>April 20-22          | Issues regarding<br>the ethics of<br>communication<br>Organizational<br>Communication &<br>Mass<br>Communication |   | Leaking and<br>Whistle-blowing   | Read:<br>"Ethical Tension<br>Points in<br>Whistleblowing" by J.<br>Vernon Jensen  |
| Week<br>Fifteen<br>April 27-29           | Issues regarding<br>the ethics of<br>communication<br><br>Mass Media<br>Public Speaking                          | Answer:<br>What are the ethical<br>issues that outing and<br>whistle-blowing posit for<br>communication ethics? |  | "Exploring the<br>Tension between The<br>First Amendment and<br>Ethics in the Case of<br>"Outing" by Paula<br>Tompkins. |
| Week<br>Sixteen<br>Final week<br>May 4-6 | CODES OF<br>ETHICS   | How useful are<br>professional codes of<br>ethics?<br><br>JOURNAL DUE DATE                                      | Find any code(s) of<br>ethics related to your<br>career/profession and<br>bring it to class. | Read: NCA Credo for<br>Ethical<br>Communication   |
| May 11                                   |  | 11-Term paper due<br>today  |  |   |

## Bibliography

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## I. Using the Ethics Models for Analysis of Case Studies

In unit 2, you will study a wide variety standards (criteria) designed for the analysis of communication ethics. While these criteria are diverse and quite numerous, they can be categorized within a limited number of models. I'm using the term model quite loosely here, but the word fits because we are representing ethical concepts within the framework of various social issues. For example, chapter two of your text deals with ethics standards related to political ideas. We'll say that these standards (though there are a variety of them and they are different from one another) form the political model. Here's why: political systems are fashioned from basic social assumptions. One of these might be "government authority must be derived from the consent of the governed." Another might be, "People must have access to information critical to deciding who should govern." Obviously these examples are, in fact, central to democratic government. A political speaker, by lying to the public, deprives people of information which they need to give their consent through the ballot box. Therefore, one can make the argument that a political figure who lies to the public about some important public issue is behaving unethically.

The human nature model is based upon the notion that there are certain fundamental characteristics that make us human. For example, Aristotle's rational capacity view suggests that we humans are unique in our ability to use reason. By engaging our minds, examining facts, utilizing logic, and generally behaving in a reasonable fashion, we are empowering and fully utilizing our humanity. However, that which works against our ability to reason works against our very humanity. If, for example, we can demonstrate that an advertisement on TV has been developed for the purpose of short-circuiting our thinking power and preventing us from fully reasoning to the proper conclusion, a good argument can be made that such an advertisement is unethical, based on Aristotle's principle.

Of course, there are many different views of exactly what the key ingredients in a political system are, or just what key ingredients serve to make us fully human, but if a writer uses these systems (political or human nature) to establish standards for what is, and what is not, ethical, then the standards can be said to belong to that particular model.

We'll review each of these models in some detail, along with dialogue, situational, religious, and legal models. The important thing for us to consider at this point is "how are the models to be applied in judging communication ethics?" A number of years ago, a political figure in Texas, Lena Guerro, was shown to have lied about graduating from a university (I believe it was the University of Texas). When this hit the newspapers, there was an immediate, gut level condemnation of the act. A number of editorials were written which suggested that Ms. Guerro had behaved unethically. However, in the absence of established criteria, these opinions were no more than unsupported inferences. The debate into the lie developed into a series of claims and counterclaims. In the absence of anything

else to talk about, a discussion began about whether the lie had caused any real harm or had harmed Ms. Guererro's work for the state. This pattern is often observed-in the absence of standards by which to judge ethics, the debate turns into a discussion framed from a utilitarian perspective.

So, what is needed in order to turn a claim into a cogent **argument**? The answer is usually something like "reasoning from evidence to a conclusion using criteria." The rendering of valid judgments about ethics requires the establishment of criteria which can be (at least tacitly) agreed upon by both parties to the discussion. That is why it is important for us to study potential criteria for making ethical judgments. Anyone can make a claim about ethics-that's easy (e.g., "I think he was being unethical when he did that). The difficult part is framing the issues, through criteria and evidence, into a cogent argument. If we are unable to do this, then we run the risk of being a society of independent operators running around and making judgments that are completely contradictory and hold no argumentative weight. If ethical behavior is important to our world (and it is!) then we need common standards for deciding what is, and is not, ethical.

Historically, courses in ethics have been taught by using case studies. This use enables students to apply criteria to specific incidents of potential ethical lapses, usually involving cases that are close calls and not easy to solve. This serves two purposes: development of workable standards and firming up personal views about where decision lines fall. Most people who have a background in Judeo-Christian beliefs would agree on the criteria of truthfulness-that lying is a bad thing (that's our criteria). However, would it be wrong to tell a lie if that is the only way to save a life? Aristotle's principle of the golden mean (chapter one) tells us that virtue is a point on a continuum between two vices. One vice (the obvious one) is the hurt and pain that can be caused by being untruthful. Is there a vice associated with being too truthful? If you agree with this second point, where do you draw the line? This is the "firming up personal views" function of case studies. The use of cases for this purpose is called **casuistry**, a technique that has been around for hundreds of years.