

MSU COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION ARTS AND SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

JRN 430/JRN 830

News Media Law & Ethics

Summer 2025

Lecture/Online Asynchronous

Prosper Senyo

Office: CAS 514

Office hours: By appointment and via zoom

Email: senyopro@msu.edu

Your instructor:

Prosper Senyo (he/him) - Prosper Kofi Senyo is a Ph.D. candidate in the Information and Media program in the School of Journalism. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Ghana Institute of Journalism.



Prosper's research interests sit at the intersection of media and society. Specifically, he is concerned with the role of the public sphere, as a normative force for good governance in African democracies. He is interested in conceptualizing both the structural boundaries of the public spheres in African democracies and the specific communicative practices that take place within them.

Required Texts

"Trager's The Law of Journalism and Mass Communication" 5th or 8th Edition. *By Victoria Smith Ekstrand, Caitlin Ring Carlson, Erin Coyle, Susan D. Ross, Amy Reynolds*

"Media Ethics: Issues and Cases" 10th Edition. *By Lee Wilkins, Chad Painter, Philip Patterson*

COURSE Description:

This course covers legal and ethical issues related to reporting and presenting the news; journalists' responsibilities and rights; federal and state statutes, media platforms rules and regulations; and the importance of legal precedent. Journalism and media legal frameworks approved 20, 50, or more than

100 years ago, such as the First Amendment, were passed to regulate the media formats of their time. Originally, media laws were intended for newspapers, but with the arrival of radio, TV, cable, the Internet and social media, governmental controls have been in a catch-up mode, and laws and regulations for newer media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, google etc. are evolving since the early 2000s. We will examine the evolutions of these laws and regulations and see how controversies over content in online and cyber spaces are impacting the trends of new regulations.

This course would help you to understand the legal standards that govern the practice of journalism and the operation of media establishments in the United States. Furthermore, the course examines the philosophies or ethics and ethical decision making that guide journalists and media practitioners in their work. Although codes of ethics and rule book guidelines are important standards used by media professionals for making ethical decisions, the course adopts a more robust approach for making ethical decisions that are grounded in philosophical foundations.

My approach in the course includes lectures on core concepts and issues about the law and its applicability to the press and media industry; exploration of theories and philosophies that undergird the foundations of press law and ethics; and exploration of case studies relating to legal issues and ethical decision making in real world situations.

For specific reference to a full list of topics and cases that are covered in the course, see the weekly schedule of readings and assignments in this syllabus.

Assignments

Your major assignments include:

- Participation Weekly Assignments (100 points)
- Legal Case Study Assignments (50 points)
- Midterm group project (50 points)
- Final Exams (50 points)
- Total 250 (points)

Legal Case Study Assignments

You will be required to analyze five selected legal cases using a model that you will be taught in the class. Each assignment must be a minimum of 2 pages, typed double-spaced using font 12 of Times New Roman. Formatting instructions must be strictly followed, or points will be deducted from those who default. These assignments must be submitted as pdf files in a Dropbox on D2L that will be provided. These are academic essays and students must properly cite all consulted sources using the APA citation format. Failure to properly acknowledge can lead to a charge of plagiarism which will be severely punished (see notes on academic integrity at the bottom of this document). Each assignment will be embedded in Turnitin which can easily detect any intellectual dishonesty.

Participation Assignments

You would be required to take part in an online participation board where you engage content in your coursework. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that you are actively taking part in the course and benefiting from course materials and lectures. You will be required to debate a real world ethical or legal dilemma that stakeholders in media law such as journalists, lawmakers, judges and the public face while shaping media law and ethics. You will need to apply principles and concepts learnt in the course to support your argument. There will be eight such assignments throughout the semester.

Midterm Group Project

You will work in groups on an assigned project that challenges you to apply concepts learnt in this course. Each group will consist of four members who will work together on a selected project. The purpose is to give you an

opportunity to be creative and demonstrate leadership. Thus, your ability to work in a group will be graded as part of the project.

Final Exams

The final test will be a quiz that assesses your ability to engage in critical assessment and knowledge of key concepts and issues covered during the semester. The quiz will cover key concepts that you were taught throughout the semester.

Assignment Policy

Students must take all assignments seriously to fully benefit from this course. All assignments must be submitted by due dates, unless a student obtains a permission for an extension, based on a reasonable extenuating circumstance. Students who fail to submit an assignment on due dates without a prior extension will get a zero for such assignments. But in the rare instances where such students will be allowed to do these assignments, they will be given special makeup exercises, which will be more complex and demanding in nature. This is to ensure that all students get a fair reward for a fair amount of time and effort used in their assignments. Also, such assignments when granted will be graded before the end of the semester. But there will be no guarantee that they will be graded earlier because the instructor may be prioritizing more current assignments that are done on time, over those that are done retroactively. These policies are subject to review based on the realities of the course.

Resources: please read the New York Times & the Wall Street Journal media stories:

ASMSU is providing access to the New York Times and Wall Street Journal digital editions for MSU students, faculty, and staff.

Signup instructions: <https://asmsu.msu.edu/home/services/717-2/>

Archival and current editions of these papers are also available in MSU Libraries databases.

Grading Scale:

Grading Scale:

4.0 = 90 – 100%

3.5 = 85 – 89.9

3.0 = 75 – 84.9

2.5 = 70 – 74.9

2.0 = 65 – 69.9

1.5 = 60 – 64.9

1.0 = 50 – 59.9

0.0 = 0.0 – 49.9

Course Program, Readings and Assignments:

Week	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Assignments
1	May 12	Introductions & Overview	Syllabus & Introductions to textbooks	1 st Participation Assignment due: May 17, 11:59pm.
2	May 19	The Rule of Law: Law in a Changing Communication and Political Environment	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, chapter 1	2 nd Participation Assignment due: May 24, 11:59pm.

3	May 26	The First Amendment: Speech and Press Freedoms in Theory and Reality	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 2.	1 st FIRAC Case Study due: May 31, 11:59 pm.
4	June 2	Speech Distinctions: Different Categories Trigger Distinct Treatment	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 3; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 1 (An Introduction to Ethical Decision-Making)	3 rd Participation Assignment due: June 7, 11:59 pm.
5	June 9	Libel and Emotional Distress: The Plaintiff's Case	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 4; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 2, (Information Ethics: A Profession Seeks the Truth)	2 nd FIRAC Assignment due: June 14, 11:59 pm.
6	June 16	Libel: Defenses and Privileges	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism Chapter 5; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 3(Looking for Solitude in the Global Village)	4 th Participation Weekly Assignment Due: June 21, 11:59 pm.
7	June 23	Protecting Privacy: Conflicts Among the Press, the Government, and the Right to Privacy	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism Chapter 6; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 4 (Loyalty: Choosing Between Competing Allegiances)	3 RD FIRAC Case Study and 5 th Participation Assignment Due: June 28, 11:59 pm.
8	June 30	Gathering Information: Opportunities and	Trager's law of mass communication	6 th Participation Assignment Due: July 5, 11:59 pm.

		Obstacles	and Journalism Chapter 7; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 5 (Mass Media in a Democratic Society: Keeping a Promise)	
9	July 7	Overseeing Justice: Speech and Press Freedoms in and About the Courts	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 8; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 6 (Informing a Just Society)	Midterm Group Project Due: July 12, 11:59 pm
10	July 14	Electronic Media Regulation: From Radio to the Internet	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 9; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 8 (Picture This: Technology, visual information, and evolving standards)	4 th FIRAC and 7 th Participation Assignment due: July 19, 11:59 pm.
11	July 21	Obscenity and Indecency: Social Norms and Legal Standards	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 10; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 9 (Media Economics: The Deadline Meets the Bottom Line)	8 th & Final Participation Assignment due: July 26, 11:59 pm.
12	July 28	Intellectual Property	Trager's law of mass communication and Journalism, Chapter 11; Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Chapter 10 (The Ethical Dimensions of Art and Entertainment)	5 th & Final FIRAC Case Study Due: August 2, 11:59 pm.

13	August 4	Revision	No assignment
14	August 11	Final Exams Week	Final Exam Due August 15, 11:59 pm.

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Students are expected to do their own work on all assignments. Students who cheat, fabricate, or plagiarize will receive a 0.0 on the assignment and may fail the course. Plagiarism means the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving proper credit. Article 2.3.3 of the *Academic Freedom Report* states "the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the School of Journalism adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, *Protection of Scholarship and Grades*, and in the all- University Policy on *Integrity of Scholarship and Grades*, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student and Handbook and Resource Guide*. For additional information on this topic, please refer to the website of the Office of the Ombudsman at MSU at: <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestystud.html>

Contact the J-School Director

We want you to have a rich and rewarding learning experience in the School of Journalism. Please contact School director, Dr. Tim Vos, at any time if you want to share a great experience, raise concerns, or just share ideas. You can reach him directly via this form: <https://forms.office.com/r/uJPZDdnMQx>

Or stop by the School office in room 305 in the Communication Arts & Sciences Building to say hello or schedule an appointment.