



MCOM 481 - Mass Communications Law - Fall 2007

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Office Hours:

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., Tuesday, Thursday

Catalog Description:

Legal limitations and privileges affecting publishing, advertising, broadcasting, telecasting; consideration of legal philosophy bearing on mass communications media. Prerequisite: Junior standing.

Purpose:

The purpose of this course is to provide future communicators with an understanding of media law necessary to enter into professional practice. This course is not aimed at training future lawyers; however, students interested in such careers would benefit from this class as we review legal theory and practice.

Objectives:

Upon the successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Describe how courts, legislative bodies, and administrative agencies function.
2. Explain the theories, principles, and rules behind relevant media law decisions.
3. Understand how laws and regulations affect the various practices of professional communication.
4. Identify the free expression rights of professional communicators and the limits on those rights, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.
5. Independently apply critical thinking skills to examine significant media law issues.

Course Format:

This course is designed around a lecture/seminar format. Each class member is expected to have thoroughly read all designated readings in advance of the classroom discussion. To stimulate discussion and assure participation, students will be regularly and randomly called upon to describe and interpret assigned material.

Required Textbook:

John D. Zelezny. Communications Law: Liberties, Restraints, and the Modern Media. Belmont, California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007. ISBN: 0-495-05029-6.

Evaluation:

Course grades will be determined by class participation, quizzes, and three examinations. No extra credit projects or assignments will be available. The instructor reserves the right to change the total number of assignments for the course, or to redistribute the total points for the course among the various projects.

Cellular telephones and other communications devices must be switched off during the administration of all quizzes and examinations. A student accessing such a device during the administration of a quiz or examination will automatically receive a failing grade for that exercise.

Graduate students will be expected to set the standard for their undergraduate colleagues. All Graduate students will also complete a scholarly paper on a subject germane to media law approved by the instructor. This paper must be carefully researched and thoughtfully prepared according to an accepted standard (APA, MLA, or Turabian) for scholarly papers. Three deadlines will apply to the graduate scholarly paper: 1) a one-page typewritten proposal/abstract, 2) a typewritten literature review/preliminary bibliography, and 3) the final paper. Each graduate student should meet individually with the instructor to discuss the specific requirements to be met by each of these deadlines.

Grades may be discussed at any time throughout the term during the instructor's office hours, by appointment only. Final grades will not be posted or otherwise distributed before they are made available online by the University Registrar.

The weighting of the requirements of this course, as a percentage of the final grade, is as follows:

Undergraduate Students:

Class Participation = 5%

Quizzes = 10%

Examination #1 = 25%

Examination #2 = 30%

Final Examination = 30%

Graduate Students:

Class Participation = 5%

Quizzes = 10%

Examination #1 = 20%

Examination #2 = 25%

Final Examination = 30%

Scholarly Paper = 10%

Grading for this course will be determined by the following scale:

90 - 100 % = A Extraordinary Effort. All criteria are performed with a high degree of excellence and enthusiasm. The student demonstrates active participation and high-quality work.

80 - 89 % = B Honorable Effort. All criteria are performed with considerable endeavor and energy. The student solidly participates and demonstrates a desire to achieve more than basic requirements.

70 - 79% = C Average Effort. All criteria are performed satisfactorily, though with some room for improvement. The student demonstrates that he or she is fully engaged with the class.

60 - 69 % = D Minimal Effort. The criteria are performed with considerable room for improvement. The student falls short of being fully engaged with the class, but demonstrates a basic effort to pass the course.

59% and below = F Unsatisfactory Effort. The student fails to meet the criteria and displays little or no effort to pass the course. This is usually accompanied by poor participation and minimal attendance.

Class Participation:

Class participation points consider factors beyond mere physical presence. During each class meeting the instructor will randomly call on students to discuss the assigned readings. The intent of this dialogue is to require each student to think about the material beyond just memorizing it. When evaluating the student's in-class participation, the instructor will consider evidence of preparation for and knowledge of the material being discussed. The student's participation grade will be based on the quality of interaction – not on the quantity alone. The student will receive a daily participation grade of "0" if he or she is absent on a day when his or her name is drawn.

Quizzes:

Unannounced quizzes will be administered as a part of this course. Any quizzes administered as a part of this course are designed to determine the student's diligence in reading assigned material and his or her understanding of that material. Each quiz will be administered at the beginning of the given class session without prior notice. A student arriving late to class will not be allowed to complete any quiz administered during that session. Make-up quizzes will not be administered; any missed quiz will be recorded as 0%. The student's single lowest quiz score will be excluded from the semester average.

Examinations:

Examinations shall consist of a varied format, including true/false, multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Make-up examinations will only be allowed with an official University excuse (see "Attendance" below). Make-up examinations must be administered before the first regular class meeting following the student's return to school. Students missing examinations because of University activities must arrange to take the examination before the scheduled examination date. The Final Examination will contain a comprehensive element.

Plagiarism:

Each student is expected to do his or her own basic research and compose his or her own answers to all work for this course. The University forbids plagiarism, and provides for penalties for students violating this policy (Refer to the "Cheating and Plagiarism" section of the University's Student Policy Manual). In any case of copying, both the copier and the lender will be penalized.

Attendance:

As required by University policy, attendance will be taken each class session. A student not seated at the time his or her name is called will be recorded as absent. The University regards class attendance as an obligation as well as a privilege, and defines as “excessive” absences of ten percent (10%) or more of the total class sessions for any course; for this particular course a total of three (3) absences is considered excessive under that University policy. Your attendance and participation in discussions is vital to the class as a whole. By registering for this class you have thus contracted to be here, and you are expected to accept and fulfill that responsibility. If you are not in class, you cannot participate, and participation is a major grade factor.

Each student is allowed a maximum of two (2) absences without penalty. Such absences shall include any excused absences. Further unexcused absences will result in the lowering of the student’s final course grade by one (1) full letter grade for each absence. Absences for lecture meetings scheduled immediately prior to or following holidays or break periods will be double-weighted.

Acceptable excuses for absences are listed in the University’s Student Policy Manual: 1) authorized trips away from the University or absences resulting from special duties at the University, 2) confinement in a hospital or other in-patient facility or doctor’s excused absence, or 3) a death in the immediate family. Each student should make every effort to ensure medical appointments do not conflict with the class schedule. Excuses must be presented for the instructor’s consideration within three (3) class meetings of the student’s return to class. Students participating in University activities, whose names appear on the Authorized Class Absences list from the Academic Affairs office, should specifically notify the instructor. Absences do not excuse you from performing with the rest of the class.

Tardiness is disturbing to the class; habitual lateness is viewed unfavorably. Be considerate to your colleagues and be punctual to each lecture. Tardiness counts as one-half (½) of an absence. Likewise, students should not leave class early. For a student to be recorded as tardy, instead of absent, he or she must specifically speak with the instructor at the end of the class session.

Pagers, cellular telephones, and other devices must be switched to silent mode during class time. Students are not to send or retrieve text messages during class time.

Drop Policy:

Any student who does not withdraw from this course, and who otherwise fails to complete the requirements of this course, will automatically receive a final grade of “F.”

Students with Special Needs:

A student with special needs seeking reasonable individual assistance or accommodation to achieve the objectives of this course must immediately file a Special Needs Accommodation Form with the Counseling Center (Refer to the University’s Student Policy Manual).

Assent to Policies:

The student’s continued enrollment and attendance in this course reflects his or her agreement to abide by the policies enumerated in this syllabus.

Ten Suggestions for the Successful Completion of this Course:

Media law courses are notoriously difficult for many students in academic programs such as ours. Recognizing the innate challenges of the material we will be studying, there are several ways each student can improve the likelihood of successfully completing this course:

1. Reading the assignment before coming to class will not only help you understand the lectures better, but it will also improve your chances of doing well on any quiz or if you are called upon to answer questions that day. Buy the textbook.
2. The study of law is a reading-intensive discipline. Although the textbook we will be studying this semester is not as demanding as some, the reading of law can be tedious. Reading a law textbook is not like reading a novel. It is also not something you should do casually while watching television. Speed reading and skimming will not work for this course. If you read a paragraph and do not understand it, you should re-read it before moving on to the next.
3. When reading, question the material. Why was a particular decision made? How do decisions affect media practitioners? What would you, as a media professional, do in specific situation? Make notes of any concept that is not clear to you so that you can ask for clarification in class. Take notes on your readings, and then backfill any additional information following the class lecture.
4. Take thorough notes, both during your reading and during the lecture/discussion. Review your notes regularly, not just on the night before the examination.
5. Attend every class as an active participant. Be involved and attentive in class. Do not sleep or read the newspaper. Listen. Ask intelligent questions.
6. Get a study partner or group and schedule study sessions regularly. With your textbook and notes at hand, ask each other hypothetical questions you might expect on the quizzes and examinations. Do not wait until the examination is imminent to begin studying, or you will be overwhelmed by the amount of material.
7. This course requires your time outside of class. National standards suggest that a student should plan to spend two to three hours studying outside of class for every hour spent in class. It makes little difference how many jobs you have to work to pay for school, how many other courses you are carrying, or what your parent/spouse/child expects of you. The amount of time needed to succeed in this course is independent of the other pressures you have.
8. The three biggest causes of failure have absolutely nothing to do with a student's ability. The most common reasons for failure are: a) not attending, b) not reading, and c) not regularly studying.
9. Take advantage of student services when necessary. At ULM, such services include the Student Success Center (<http://www.ulm.edu/cass/>), Counseling Center (<http://www.ulm.edu/counselingcenter/>), and Student Health Services.
10. Talk with your professor. Do not wait until the end of the academic term to show a sudden interest in your performance in this course.

Schedule:

The sequence of topics to be discussed for this course is detailed below. As discussions of these topics evolve, adjustments to this preliminary schedule may become necessary. As such, students are advised to be prepared for alterations in this schedule, including changes in readings, discussions, and examination dates.

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Lecture Topic:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>
Aug 21	Course Introduction/The U.S. Legal System	
23	The U.S. Legal System (Continued)	Chapter 1
28	(Continued)/The First Amendment	Chapter 2
30	The First Amendment (Continued)	
Sep 4	(Continued)	
6	Damage to Reputation	Chapter 4
11	(Continued)	
13	Examination #1	
18	Invasion of Privacy	Chapter 5
20	(Continued)	
25	Graduate Research Proposal/Abstract Due	
25	Invasion of Privacy (Continued)	
27	Access to Places and Information	Chapter 6
Oct 2	(Continued)	
4	Media and the Justice System	Chapter 7
8	<i>Mid-term grading ends</i>	
9	Media and the Justice System (Continued)	
11	<i>Fall Holiday</i>	
16	Media and the Justice System (Continued)	
18	Examination #2	
23	Graduate Research Literature Review/Preliminary Bibliography Due	
23	Creative Property	Chapter 8
25	TBA	
29	<i>Final date for dropping courses or resigning from the University</i>	
30	Creative Property (Continued)	
Nov 1	(Continued)	
6	The Federal Communications Commission and Broadcast Regulation	pp. 351-364, 376-381
8	Electronic Media Content	pp. 386-400, 402-403
13	Obscenity and Indecency	Chapter 11
15	(Continued)	
20	Graduate Research Paper Due	
20	Commercial Speech	Chapter 12
22	<i>Thanksgiving Recess</i>	
27	Commercial Speech (Continued)	
29	(Continued)	
Dec 4	Comprehensive Final Examination (Tuesday, 10:00-11:50 a.m.)	