

Media Law & Ethics
LAW 3404 (Section 18108) / Spring 2026

Schedule: Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:35 a.m. – 10:55 a.m.
Journalism Building 216

Professor: Carrie Lymanstall
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Phone: 614-314-5139 (cell)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.;
Thursdays, 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.; or
By appointment

Texts¹: Roy L. Moore, et al., *Media Law and Ethics* (6th ed. 2022).

Other excerpts/readings posted on CarmenCanvas

Software: Microsoft Word

Equipment: Computer or tablet with high-speed Internet connection. You're encouraged to bring your laptop/tablet to class.

Course Page: <https://carmen.osu.edu/>. Please check our Carmen page frequently.

Course Information

Welcome to Media Law and Ethics. In this course, we explore the legal and ethical issues implicated by the First Amendment and laws regulating speech and conduct. As part of this exploration, we will cover a wide range of topics implicated by working in the field of communications, including:

- The operation of the U.S. court system and available remedies;
- The First Amendment;
- Defamation torts;
- Privacy torts;
- Indecency and obscenity laws;
- Copyright and the doctrine of fair use;
- Digital media and Section 230;
- Commercial speech;
- Accessing public documents and fora; and

¹ I have no preference as to whether you purchase hard copies or electronic copies of the book.

- The functional differences between legal and ethical rules and requirements, including objectivity in reporting, conflicts of interests, and sources.

Course Policies and Procedures

Attendance

This course will meet twice per week and has a mandatory attendance policy. Only students enrolled in this section are permitted to attend class. The readings and assignments in this class are meant to supplement our in-class discussions. If you are not present, you will miss out on the majority of what this class offers. Worse still, your voice and ideas will not be included in our discussions.

Each student is allowed **two unexcused** absences. Any further absences must be excused for acceptable reasons. Those reasons include university-sanctioned events, extended illness, religious observance, or familial emergencies.

Each class will meet for roughly 80 minutes in person, but may be shortened in weeks when videos are assigned for viewing.

Recording Class

This class is formatted as an interactive participatory class and thus is not particularly conducive to recording. **I do not record classes** absent compelling circumstances. Furthermore, students are not permitted to create recordings of any part of any class, whether by video, photography, audio, or any other means (including computer screenshots).

Course Communications

CarmenCanvas. I will communicate about this course through announcements in class and through the course website on CarmenCanvas. I will post assigned readings and videos on Carmen at least a week before the corresponding class. Please check Carmen frequently.

Contacting me. During the workweek, I strive to respond to emails within 24 hours. Please email me (lymanstall.3@osu.edu) rather than sending a message to me via Carmen.

Sharing/Posting Course Material. I generally post all my course materials, including PowerPoint slides and assignment prompts, to CarmenCanvas. I own a copyright in these materials. These materials are provided to you only for the educational purposes of this class. You may not share course materials beyond the confines of this class. **You may not post my course materials on the Internet for others to use without my express permission.**

Weather or Short-Term Closing or Cancellation

If in-person classes are canceled, I will notify you of the alternative teaching methods that will be offered to ensure continuity of instruction for this class. Communication will be via CarmenCanvas.

Classroom Etiquette and Expectations

The following ground rules have been developed out of respect for both the students and the instructors in this class.

- Coming to class on time: Coming to class late interrupts the flow of our discussions and distracts the rest of the class. You are expected to come on time and be attentive when class begins. If you must be late for a legitimate reason, please inform me in advance.
- Once class starts: Put away any distractions. Although you are not expected to be completely silent during the class, you are expected to keep your thoughts on the subject and your comments at least related to the topic.
- Leaving early: If you must leave early for a legitimate reason, please let me know in advance.
- Other electronic equipment: Cell phones should be turned off or set to silent.
- Participate in class: Much of this class depends on participation and discussion rather than traditional lecture. Your participation is important.

Assignments and Assessments

Components. Your final grade for this class will be comprised of the following:

Class Participation/Professionalism	100 points
Speed Court Case Quizzes (10 @ 10 points each)	100 points
Short analysis papers (3 @ 100 points each)	300 points
Midterm	200 points
Final Exam	300 points
<i>Optional: Extra Credit Presentations</i>	<i>up to 50 points</i>

- ***Class Participation/Professionalism (100 points).*** This component of your score includes preparing for class, attending class, participating in class discussions, and completing exercises and assignments on time throughout the semester.
- ***Speed Court Case Quizzes (100 points – 10 points each).*** At the end of most weeks, you will complete a short online quiz assessing your understanding of cases and ethical issues discussed in class. Quizzes typically consist of 10 questions and are timed (10 minutes). You may use your notes. These quizzes are designed to test comprehension—not memorization—and may be used as study tools for the midterm and final exams.

- ***Short Analysis Papers (300 points – 100 points each).*** I will post three prompts over the course of the semester, each presenting a hypothetical fact pattern that could give rise to legal issues. You will write short essays (roughly 700-900 words) analyzing potential legal issues using the legal rules we've discussed in class.
- ***Midterm (March 5, 2026) (200 points).*** The midterm exam will include multiple-choice and short-essay questions and will be administered in class on March 5, 2026.
- ***Final Exam (Check University Calendar for Date) (300 points).*** The final exam will include multiple-choice and short essay questions and will be cumulative.
- ***Optional Extra Credit “Hot Topic” Presentations (up to 50 points total).*** Hot topics are issues in the news about ethics, the law, or anything else interesting that relates to our readings and discussions. Hot topic presentations are 5 to 10-minute presentations on a topic in the news. You should submit to me a possible topic at least 2 weeks prior to the proposed date of your presentation. I need to approve topics and make sure we are not duplicating. We have room for up to 4 presentations per class. Each hot topic presentation is eligible for 25 points of extra credit.

Independent Work Requirement. All writing and research for this course must be done independently. If I permit collaboration, you may share work only to the point I have authorized. **You may not show your writing, including drafts, to anyone.** If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

Penalties for Late Submissions. Late work will not be accepted or evaluated.

Deadline Extensions. I will grant extensions in compelling circumstances. To seek an extension on an assignment, contact me by email at least 24 hours before the deadline. I will grant extensions requested after the 24-hour deadline in cases of true emergency. Please note that even if you request an extension before the deadline, I may still deny it.

Generative AI. You may not use generative AI to create work product in this class that you submit for a grade. You may use MS Editor and Grammarly to improve grammar, clarity, and mechanics, but you may not use these tools to create content that is graded. If you are unsure about the appropriate use of AI tools, you should seek clarification from me.

Course Schedule

The calendar below provides a ***general*** outline for our progression through the various topics we will cover. Given the dynamic nature of the media world around us, however, we may need to make modifications so that we can appropriately cover breaking or significant news as it develops during the semester. As changes occur, I will provide updates regarding modifications to our schedule on Carmen.

Date	Topics and Readings	Assignment
1/13	Intro to Class: What is media law? Read: Syllabus	
1/15	Sources of Media Law Read: Medial Law & Ethics ("MLE"): 1-19 (stop at "Reporter's Privilege") Read: Carmen posting	
1/20	The U.S. Court System and how to read a case Read: MLE 11-39 Read: Carmen posting	
1/22	Foundations of the First Amendment Read: Carmen posting (Trager 49-65; <i>Branzburg</i> ; <i>Citizens United</i>)	
1/27	The Reporter's Privilege in States Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #1 before class
1/29	The First Amendment: incorporation and levels of scrutiny Read: Carmen posting (<i>Texas v. Johnson</i> ; <i>Tinker v. Des Moines</i>)	
2/3	The First Amendment: prior restraint Read: MLE 92-120 Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #2 before class
2/5	The First Amendment: prior restraint Read: MLE 120-127 Read: Carmen posting	
2/10	Defamation: Basics – what's a tort? Read: MLE 131-139 Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #3 before class <i>Short Paper #1 prompt available</i>
2/12	Defamation: Public and private figures Read: MLE 143-152	
2/17	Defamation: Defenses Read: MLE 166-175	Complete Speed Quiz #4 before class Short Paper #1 due

2/19	Defamation: anti-SLAPP laws; conspiracies Read: MLE 152-163	
2/24	Privacy torts: appropriation and intrusion Read: MLE 180-202	Complete Speed Quiz #5 before class
2/26	Privacy torts: public disclosure of private facts and false light Read: MLE 202-220	
3/3	Mid-Semester Review	Complete Speed Quiz #6 before class
3/5	MIDTERM EXAM	
3/10	Indecency and Obscenity Read: Carmen posting (Trager 475-505)	
3/12	Copyright: Fundamentals Read: MLE 384-397 Read: Carmen posting	<i>Short Paper #2 prompt available</i>
XXX	SPRING BREAK MARCH 16-20	
3/24	Copyright: Infringement and Fair Use Read: MLE 411-424 Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #7 before class Short Paper #2 due
3/26	Commercial Speech and Advertising Read: Carmen posting (Trager 585-601)	
3/31	Commercial Speech and Advertising Read: Carmen posting (Trager 601-628)	Complete Speed Quiz #8 before class
4/2	Media Access to Courts, Meetings, and Records Read: Carmen posting	
4/7	Digital Media and Section 230 Read: MLE 267-279 Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #9 before class
4/9	Digital Media and Section 230 Read: MLE 281-298 Read: Carmen posting	
4/14	Media Ethics: A Framework Read: MLE 58-85 Read: Carmen posting	Complete Speed Quiz #10 before class

		<i>Short Paper #3 prompt available</i>
4/16	Ethics: Fairness, Truth, and Deception Read: Carmen posting (SPJ Guidebook)	
4/21	Ethics: Minimizing Harm and Conflicts Read: Carmen posting (SPJ Guidebook)	Short Paper #3 due
4/23	Final Class Review	
Exam Week	FINAL EXAM	

University Policies

Disability Accommodations

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu ; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu ; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Academic Misconduct

Academic Misconduct: Cheating and plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct defines academic misconduct as "any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University or subvert the educational process" (p. 2). Examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination.

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). If COAM determines you have violated the University's Code of Student

Conduct, the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

Written and oral assignments: Your written and oral assignments should be your own original work. In formal assignments, you should follow APA style to cite the ideas and words of your research sources. Any time you use the words of others, this must be indicated as a direct quotation with a citation to the source and page number(s), using APA style to clearly indicate the words in the direct quote. To use the words of others while providing a citation, but without indicating that there is a direct quote from the cited work, still is plagiarism.

Intellectual Diversity and Exploration

Ohio State is committed to fostering a culture of open inquiry and intellectual diversity within the classroom. This course will cover a range of information and may include discussions or debates about controversial issues, beliefs, or policies. Any such discussions and debates are intended to support understanding of the approved curriculum and relevant course objectives rather than promote any specific point of view. Students will be assessed on principles applicable to the field of study and the content covered in the course. Preparing students for citizenship includes helping them develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to reach their own conclusions regarding complex or controversial matters.

Religious Accommodation

It is Ohio State's policy to reasonably accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs and practices of all students. The policy permits a student to be absent for up to three days each academic semester for reasons of faith or religious or spiritual belief.

Students planning to use religious beliefs or practices accommodations for course requirements must inform the instructor in writing no later than 14 days after the course begins. The instructor is then responsible for scheduling an alternative time and date for the course requirement, which may be before or after the original time and date of the course requirement. These alternative accommodations will remain confidential. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all course assignments are completed.

Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a welcoming community. All Buckeyes have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom), race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment. Members of the university community also have the right to be free from all forms of sexual misconduct: sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

To report harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation and/or seek confidential and non-confidential resources and supportive measures, contact the Civil Rights Compliance Office (CRCO):

Online reporting form: <http://civilrights.osu.edu/>
Call 614-247-5838 or TTY 614-688-8605
civilrights@osu.edu

The university is committed to stopping sexual misconduct, preventing its recurrence, eliminating any hostile environment, and remedying its discriminatory effects. All university employees have reporting responsibilities to the Civil Rights Compliance Office to ensure the university can take appropriate action:

- All university employees, except those exempted by legal privilege of confidentiality or expressly identified as a confidential reporter, have an obligation to report incidents of sexual assault immediately.
- The following employees have an obligation to report all other forms of sexual misconduct as soon as practicable but at most within five workdays of becoming aware of such information: 1. Any human resource professional (HRP); 2. Anyone who supervises faculty, staff, students, or volunteers; 3. Chair/director; and 4. Faculty member.