**COMM 3100 – Communication Ethics**

Professor: Office Hours:

Office: ...and by appointment

Phone: Email:

Course Description:

Every form and instance of communication has the potential to affect or influence someone else’s thought and or behavior. Every act of communication raises a question of ethics whenever such communication can be regarded as negative or positive, harmful or helpful, life-affirming or life-threatening. This course is a course that embraces a deep, contemplative concern: *We must wonder about how we are communicating and living* to avoid complicity in committing what John Berger calls “ethicide*,” the destruction of ethical relations.*

This course aims to help you reflect upon the ethical puzzles of communicating with others as well as cultivate awareness and articulation about ethical issues across a variety of communication contexts. We will be seeking an appreciative understanding of various theories and intellectual approaches to ethical principles that have guided human thought and we will use the writings of Boochani and Berger as a kind of muse for cultivating greater thoughtfulness about how we can respond to the forces that affect, inflict and injure relational life.

We will begin the semester with a general approach to ethics as a problematic for human experience and communication theory via philosopher Hannah Arendt’s conception of “dark times,” then move to focus the bulk of our attention on the question of “communicating ethical concern” (between expressing life and controlling life) while reflecting on multicultural theories and approaches to ethical life Various pressing issues will, no doubt, arise during the semester that provoke reflection and discussion, to which we will respond. In essence, we will focus on an ethical responsiveness to what we may term a socio-cultural “cry for help” from a world that is not unrelated to us but is actually the one we are trying to live in each and every day.

Course Aspirations:

1. Understand various bases for ethical decision-making regarding communication.
2. Enhance understanding of ethical issues/dilemmas faced by communicators.
3. Engage in critical thinking by applying ethical principles to practical situations.
4. Heighten ethical awareness of oneself as a moral agent and engaged relational being.

Required Texts (to Provoke and Challenge Thoughtfulness):

Behrouz Boochani, *A Letter From Manus Island* (Borderstream, 2018).

John Berger, *Hold Everything Dear* (Vintage, 2007).

Grading Scale: A 90-100 / B 80-89 / C 70-79 / D 60-69 / F 59-0

**Coursework**

**Responsive Essay #1** 25% Your first essay will be an expressive response to your initial

readings and reflections about ethical issues in relation to Berger’s musings in *Hold Everything Dear* and Boochani’s Letter from Manus Island. The theme and question to pursue in this essay is: What does it mean to hold ethical relations dear? Read Boochani and any 4-5 essays by Berger that interest you and use these as orientations for reflection in your essay. This is

not a book review; rather, read these authors for ways to relate to what they are talking about in relation to your own developing thoughts on ethical communication. Your response should show your own thoughtfulness in responsiveness as much as determination to conclude matters. In short, stay open.

**Due: (Insert Date).**

Requirement: Minimum of 4-5 pages / 2000 words

(assuming Times New Roman-12 font, double spaced).

**Responsive Essay #2** 25% Your second essay will follow the form and approach of the first

one but be crafted as a development in your thoughts. In other words, write these reflections from new areas of openness and concern as you strive to think further and deeper than you did in your “first response.” Write to open rather than to fasten or foreclose. Consider this a challenge cultivate your own intellectual growth in your own terms as your understanding of the ethics of communication grows.

**Due: (Insert Date)**

Requirement: Minimum of 4-5 pages / 2000 words

(assuming Times New Roman-12 font, double spaced).

**Creative Project** 20% This project links art, ethics and communication in the construction

of a communal PowerPoint presentation our class will construct

and view toward at the end of the semester. Each person will create 1-2 slides to insert into the Class PPT that will both summarize the course and illuminate the diversity of our ethical concerns. More details will be shared in class and work will begin after the second essay.

**Engagement** 30% Engagement = the evidence and expressiveness of attendance +

participation + thoughtfulness. Thoughtful participation in class discussions is the primary requirement for engagement while attendance is simply the necessary requirement for participation; two unexcused absences are allowed, but more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your final grade.

**Class Meetings Calendar**

T Introduction and orientation to the course

R Existence, life, ethics, relations, art, contemplation

T Islands, prisons, walls, boxes and insulation

R Confronting and resisting “dark times”

T Three traditional Western cultural approaches

R Basic approaches, cont’d.

T Critical responsiveness

R Ethical loneliness

T Facing “the Other” (Levinas)

R Communication with or without others **Essay#1 Due**

T Domination and dysrelationality

R Receptiveness & responsiveness

T Facing others, facing ourselves

R Related issues of concern

T Ethics of liberation (Dussel)

R Liberation, cont’d.

T Exclusion, expulsion and the precariat

R Communal relations, communal virtues

T Biko, Patočka and political ethics

**R**  Ethics of care **Essay #2 Due**

T Care ethics, continued

R Earth ethics

T Imaging ethical *concern*

R Extreme Attention (Whitehead, Weil)

T Communicating ethical concern, regained

R TBA (class project work)

**T**  Final Discussion **PowerPoint Presentation**

R No class: *Study Day*

**Poem for Course Reflection**

**The Answer**

Then what is the answer? -- Not to be deluded by dreams.   
To know that great civilizations have broken down into violence,   
and their tyrants come, many times before.   
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose   
the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.   
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted   
and not wish for evil; and not be duped   
By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will   
not be fulfilled.   
To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear   
the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand   
Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars   
and his history... for contemplation or in fact...   
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,   
the greatest beauty is   
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty   
of the universe. Love that, not man   
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,   
or drown in despair when his days darken.

**Robinson Jeffers** [1887-1962].