

# Journalism 336/Media Law

## Texas A&M University-Commerce

Spring, 2015/9:30-10:45 a.m., TR  
Journalism Building, Room 104

**Catalog description:** “A study of the First Amendment and the significant legal decisions affecting print, broadcast, and interactive media. Particular attention is focused on Supreme Court decisions. Prerequisite: Junior standing or permission of instructor.”

*Advisory: if you are not a junior majoring in journalism, broadcasting, or public relations, please see me NOW with concerns or questions. I assume students in those majors have SOME background in media.*

**Course objectives:** (1) to examine the historical background of and the development of freedom of expression and the limitations that have been imposed upon those freedoms, with attention focused on free speech and a free press; (2) to examine the contemporary and ongoing issues in media law that affect free expression in the United States; (3) to give the student a foundation in mass communication law that he or she can use in entering the various fields of journalism and communication.

The media world is increasingly full of legal issues that are more non-traditional in focus and often more troublesome to the practitioner of words, visuals, and symbols. This course will help the student to recognize stumbling blocks and will aid the student in assessing these issues.

**Textbook ordered:** A decision about a textbook will be announced in class. Note the statement below about a widely-used textbook. Materials may be used from the web, particularly decisions of the Supreme Court at its site or elsewhere.

*Advisory:* A softcover edition of *Communication and the Law*, edited by W. Wat Hopkins, 2013 edition, Vision Press, © 2013 will be placed on two-hour reserve in Gee Library.

**Outside reading:** Any outside readings may be placed on two-hour reserve in Gee Library or an attempt will be made to determine if a reading is online. Either way, the student is responsible for the assignments.

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**Handouts:** I use a lot of handouts to supplement and reinforce what is said in class. The student is responsible for such materials for quizzes. The student should not, in my view, rely solely on these notes for an understanding of legal topics pertinent to journalists. *Careful attention to classroom materials is vital to a comprehension of the fundamentals of each topic covered in J336. Listening is an art all communicators (and citizens) need to practice, and it is vital in this class as in interpersonal relationships. If you do not follow my comments, ASK.*

**Outline of course material:** J336 covers a broad substantive range of material from the traditional, libel and copyright, for example, to the non-traditional, the impact of technology today. Or, to phrase it another way, media law covers the “old media” or offline and the “new media” or online. Unfortunately, this is difficult to accomplish in one semester; ideally, J336 would be a two-semester course. Thus, the instructor has to reach what might be considered a balance of content and do so in a limited time for those issues affecting print journalists, not to mention professionals in promotion, broadcasting, and interactive media. In addition, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more legal issues are arising in topics outside of news personnel. So, the class will move and keep moving. Fortunately, in the spring term, a break is scheduled, so we have some breathing room (**see University calendar on the web for dates**).

*Therefore, the instructor will approach the course in sections, with the specifics of each section to be covered before the next quiz with the exception, of course, of section one, which is distributed during the first sessions of class. This allows flexibility for the instructor because he has learned not to assume too much background from students, even though some basics should have been learned in previous classes. It has been the instructor’s experience that some students do not understand the news process, the communications process and the gathering of data, much less their “rights” and the “danger zones” in fields of mass communication.*

**Schedule for material to Quiz One:** The weekly schedule for section one – to the first quiz – will be distributed separately from this document. The student should read the assignment for each class before the session. The instructor cannot stress too much the fact that comprehension of legal issues is not one of memorization but one of understanding context and the significance of facts and the law upon which a decision is based.

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**Class requirements:** First, attend class. The student should listen carefully to class comments by the instructor. Attendance is recorded, and absences are recorded, as required by University policy. See the University's Catalog or web site for A&M-Commerce's statement on class attendance. Moreover, the attendance policy below will be followed, with the instructor's acknowledgement that unusual circumstances can arise. Read the following statement carefully.

*At a 4th absence by a student, Dr. Bridges reserves the right to drop the student from class through an administrative procedure at the dean's office (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Art). It is your responsibility to be in class and to be in class on time. That is your responsibility as an adult student who makes his or her own decisions at this University.*

**Second, be on time** and ready to begin the session when the instructor starts the class. **If you are late, you are absent.** Do not offer repeated excuses for tardiness, which has become a problem with some students. Managing your time is your responsibility as an adult.

**Third,** the student must conduct himself or herself with professionalism and courtesy toward all persons in the class. Civility is expected. Rude behavior will not be tolerated. Examples of rude behavior are talking in class while the instructor is talking or another student is talking, reading, sleeping, or attending to matter other than what is relevant to J336. **TURN OFF ALL cell telephones** during class.

The University previously issued this statement for syllabi: "All students at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment."

and . . .

I will distribute a statement concerning students with disabilities. Faculty have been asked to distribute this text. Please note the contacts.

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**Fourth**, each student will be required to sign a plagiarism statement for J336; the instructor keeps the form on file for this term. The instructor will not evaluate (grade) any paper of any student who does not submit a plagiarism statement for the current semester. The plagiarism statement does not go beyond Dr. Bridges' file unless an issue with a student arises, then the Department Head and other University personnel may have access to the signed statement. **I need this signed statement by January 23, 2015.**

**Course grading:** Point totals are subject to change (as needed) by Dr. Bridges.

√Four (4) quizzes (50 each)	200
√Practical work (TBD each)	150
√In-class questions (points may vary)	150
√ <u>Attendance (-2 each absence)</u>	<u>50</u>
	550 points.

**One:** Four 50-point quizzes are scheduled; this spreads the material and divides the topics into manageable portions. The fourth quiz is at the final examination hour. Thus, the final examination hour is not a comprehensive test. No makeups are allowed without written justification; makeups are not fair to students who attend and take the tests at the designated hours. Read carefully.

**Two (practical work):** Assignments will be given to enable the student to demonstrate that he or she understands the legal topic being discussed and to offer a further opportunity for students to practice their writing skills. All such assignments must be prepared on a word processor. The student should check the text to remove errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and syntax. A paper with numerous errors will be returned to you with a zero or a reduced evaluation. Writing counts. Any documentation a student uses must be properly attributed; a failure to do so might result in plagiarism, and plagiarism will result in the student being removed from the course. Further action by the University is possible.

**Three:** In-class questions will be given per a schedule OR as announced in class (**note this sentence**). Those students who choose not to prepare take the risk of "throwing away" crucial points and thus placing a heavy emphasis on "good" test grades. Or, remember what Mark Twain supposedly said: the man who does NOT read is no better off than the man who CANNOT read.

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*Advisory: Media law cannot be understood without effort and study on the part of the student. The subject, like government, history and science, for*

*example, covers a body of knowledge that must be understood if the course is to be useful to the student. Those students who do learn the fundamentals should be able to avoid the legal dangers that beset professional work today. At least, the student should be aware of legal pitfalls. Those students who choose not to learn the fundamentals will join that growing number of students today who place delivery above content and who discount the professionalism and credibility of the fields they wish to enter. And, they risk legal consequences to themselves, their employer, and the professions with their lack of knowledge.*

**Four: Participation:** students are encouraged to participate, ask questions, offer examples from the news and engage in a meaningful discussion of legal issues. Contribute examples you see; ask questions.

### **Instructor's information for students**

Dr. Lamar W. Bridges, Professor of Journalism

Office hours: afternoons (Room 127 inside Room 126) appointments are not needed, but MWFs are better.

Telephones: (903) 886-5229 (office)

(903) 886-4703 (home)

(903) 886-5239 (journalism office secretary's number)

FAX: (903) 886-5230

-LWB, 1-19-2015