

COURSE NUMBER	COMM 4317
SECTION	001
CLASS NAME	Media Law
CLASSROOM	CAB 333
MEETING DAYS/TIMES	TR 9:30-10:45 AM
INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Brian Brantley
EMAIL	<a href="mailto:brian.brantley@tamusa.edu">brian.brantley@tamusa.edu</a>
OFFICE	CAB 319C
OFFICE PHONE	210-784-2214
OFFICE HOURS	MW 8-9 AM, 1-3 PM TR 8-9 AM, 2-3 PM

### WHAT THIS CLASS ACTUALLY IS

Catalog Description – Legal and ethical limitations and responsibilities of the mass media, relationship and interaction between broadcaster, governmental regulatory agencies and the public.

Course Objectives – By the end of this course, students should be able to do each of the following:

1. Understand and apply principles and laws relating to the freedom of speech and of the press.
2. Conduct legal research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the professions, audiences, and purposes that mass communication targets/serves.
3. Think critically, creatively, and independently about legal problems and solutions unique to the various mass communication industries.
4. Analyze and apply ethical theories to real-world media scenarios.

### GETTING/KEEPING IN TOUCH

The best ways to get in touch with me are (1) talk to me in person during office hours and (2) through email (listed at the top of the page). DO NOT (repeat, DO NOT) try to get in touch with me through Blackboard Messaging. I don't ever check that, so let's just avoid that altogether.

### REQUIRED TEXT

- Mass Media Law, by Clay Calvert, Dan V. Kozlowski, & Derigan Silver, twenty-second edition; published by McGraw-Hill. You will be accessing this e-book and completing your reading assignments through Connect (McGraw-Hill's online learning platform). This means that when you purchase your book, you'll be getting not only the book itself but also access to Connect. The book is available both at the University bookstore and directly [from the publisher](#) (which I've been told is the less expensive option).
- Media Ethics at Work: True Stories from Young Professionals, by Lee Anne Peck and Guy Reel (editors), second edition; published by CQ Press. There's no Connect component for this text, so feel free to get either a physical copy or an e-book copy.

### HOW THIS CLASS IS GOING TO WORK

The class is divided into three units – Intro/Basics, Defamation, and Other (Invasion of Privacy, Accessing Records/Meetings, and Protecting News Sources).

Within each unit, we'll spend about a week covering each chapter (there are exceptions – some chapters will get three days rather than two because they're more complicated).

For each chapter that we read, students will need to complete a SmartBook assignment (this is an adaptive reading assignment), plus any other assignment that I give related to the course content. Assignments are discussed in more detail in the next section of this syllabus.

## **GRADING**

### Readings (SmartBook Assignments)

- 10% of total grade
- Administered through Connect (which is accessible through Blackboard)
- Due by 11:59 PM two days after we finish discussing a chapter (either Thursday or Saturday)
- No late submissions accepted

### Scenarios

- 50% of total grade
- One per chapter for Chapters 3-10
- Due by 11:59 PM two days after we finish discussing chapter
- Late submissions accepted for up to one week after due date, with a 10% penalty per day

### Case Studies

- 20% of total grade
- Four over the course of the semester
- Due by 11:59 PM the day before discussion of the next chapter starts (either Monday or Wednesday)
- Late submissions accepted for up to one week after due date, with a 10% penalty per day

### Quizzes

- 20% of total grade
- 3 quizzes (1 per unit) will be given
- Administered through Blackboard
- Due by 11:59 PM on the date specified in the course calendar
- No late submissions accepted

For your Scenario and Case Study assignments, you will be allowed to use [Grammarly for Education](#) in order to guide you in the writing process (but NOT as a substitute for doing the actual writing yourself). I will require you to submit each of these assignments as a Google Doc, so that I can look at your edit history and make sure you didn't (a) get some robot to do the writing for you and then (b) use the copy and paste functions to pretend like you did the writing yourself. You will also need to submit a list of the

prompts that you used in your Grammarly interactions. Any violation of any of these terms on any assignment will result in a grade of zero for that assignment.

In the interest of maximizing your chances of success in this course, I would advise you very strongly to prioritize your various commitments so that you can submit all of your assigned work on time. Zeroes have a destructive impact on your overall grade.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory for this class and all others in the Communication program. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to check Blackboard, find out about any assignments/due dates/handouts/announcements that were covered in the class(es) you missed, and make up any work you missed.

**Absences:** Missing the equivalent of two weeks of class due to unexcused absences will reduce your final grade for the course by one full letter grade. Missing the equivalent of three weeks of class due to unexcused absences means that you cannot pass the course. Should this happen, you will (a) need to drop the course or (b) receive a failing grade. In a course like this one, six absences is the equivalent of missing three weeks of class.

- An excused absence is one in which you miss class either for a required activity or because of illness (excessive excused absences can also result in you not passing the class).
- An unexcused absence is any other absence.

**Arriving on time:** This course begins at 2 pm every Monday and Wednesday. If you arrive after attendance has been recorded, then you will be counted late for that class session.

**Accumulated lates:** Three lates equals one absence. These add up more quickly than you'd think.

**Classroom distractions:** If you're doing something in class that has nothing to do with what we're covering that day, then I'm likely to be distracted by what you're doing. If you distract me, I will ask you as politely as possible to stop. If you persist in the distracting behavior, then you will be removed from class for the remainder of that day's class.

**Use of Generative AI:** Your instructor assumes that all work submitted by COMM 4317 students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

## **IMPORTANT A&M-SAN ANTONIO POLICIES AND RESOURCES**

Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Support Services in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210, or at (210) 784-1335 or visit <https://www.tamusa.edu/index.html> or email us at [dss@tamusa.edu](mailto:dss@tamusa.edu).

Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing [tutoring@tamusa.edu](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.edu), calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services.

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2'). For more information and self-help resources, please visit [www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling)

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-operations-plan.pdf> and <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-action-plan.pdf>

Download the SafeZone App for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on “Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center” to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://bit.ly/WLDCCenter>.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, and special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations). You are also encouraged to visit the Patriots’ Casa in-person room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student’s GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as “F” grades and will impact the student’s GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or

discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator ([titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu), 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant students that would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition and that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status ([titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu); 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

*Students' Rights*

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

### *Students' Responsibilities*

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, University Catalog and to comply with them, as well as federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide an environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notification.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

**USE OF AI:** The only artificial intelligence (AI) tool permitted in this course (for students who wish to use it) is Grammarly for Education. You may use this to improve your writing in general and to correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style errors. To adhere to our scholarly values, students must include a list of the prompts that they used to produce the work that they submit. Using an AI tool simply to generate content qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

## TENTATIVE FALL 2025 COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK	DATE	CLASSROOM TOPIC	IMPORTANT DATES
	UNIT 1	INTRO/BASICS	
1	8/26	Intro to Course	
1	8/28	Intro to Ethical Theories (Peck & Reel, Chp 1)	
2	9/2	The American Legal System (Calvert, Chp 1)	
2	9/4	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 1 due 9/6
3	9/9	The First Amendment: The Meaning of Freedom (Calvert, Chp 2)	
3	9/11	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 2 due 9/13 Case Study 1 due 9/15
4	9/16	The First Amendment: Contemporary Problems (Calvert, Chp 3)	
4	9/18	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 3 due 9/20 Chapter 3 Scenario due 9/20
5	9/23	Ethics and the First Amendment	Quiz 1 due 9/26
	UNIT 2	DEFAMATION	
5	9/25	Defamation: Establishing a Case (Calvert, Chp 4)	
6	9/30	Continue from previous class	
6	10/2	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 4 due 10/4 Chapter 4 Scenario due 10/4
7	10/7	Defamation: Proof of Fault (Calvert, Chp 5)	
7	10/9	Continue from previous class	
8	10/14	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 5 due 10/16 Chapter 5 Scenario due 10/16
8	10/16	Defamation: Defenses and Damages (Calvert, Chp 6)	
9	10/21	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 6 due 10/23 Chapter 6 Scenario due 10/23
9	10/23	Ethical Theory and Defamation	Quiz 2 due 10/26 Case Study 2 due 10/27
	UNIT 3	INVASION OF PRIVACY, ETC.	
10	10/28	Invasion of Privacy: Appropriation (Calvert, Chp 7)	
10	10/30	Invasion of Privacy: Intrusion (Calvert, Chp 7)	SmartBook Chapter 7 due 11/1 Chapter 7 Scenario due 11/1
11	11/4	Invasion of Privacy: Private Facts (Calvert, Chp 8)	SmartBook Chapter 8 due 11/6 Chapter 8 Scenario due 11/6
11	11/6	Ethical Theory and Invasion of Privacy	Case Study 3 due 11/10



12	11/11	Gathering Information: Records and Meetings (Calvert, Chp 9)	
12	11/13	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 9 due 11/15 Chapter 9 Scenario due 11/15
13	11/18	Protection of News Sources/Contempt Power (Calvert, Chp 10)	
13	11/20	Continue from previous class	SmartBook Chapter 10 due 11/22 Chapter 10 Scenario due 11/22 Case Study 4 due 12/1
14	11/25	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING	
14	11/27	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING	
15	12/2	Free Press-Fair Trial: Trial-Level Remedies and Restrictive Orders (Calvert, Chp 11)	SmartBook Chapter 11 due 12/4
15	12/4	Free Press-Fair Trial: Closed Judicial Proceedings (Calvert, Chp 12) LAST CLASS DAY OF FALL SEMESTER	SmartBook Chapter 12 due 12/6 Chapter 11/12 Scenario due 12/6 Quiz 3 due 12/7