

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE NUMBER	COMM 4317
SECTION	001
CLASS NAME	Media Law
CLASSROOM	Madla 206
MEETING DAYS/TIMES	TR 9:30–10:45 AM
TERM	Fall 2026 (August 25–December 3)
INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Brian C. Brantley
EMAIL	brian.brantley@tamusa.edu
OFFICE	CAB 319C
OFFICE PHONE	210-784-2214
OFFICE HOURS	TR 830–915 AM, 1230–130 PM, 330-4 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.

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. You will have the opportunity to purchase access to both the Connect platform and the e-book itself by clicking on (1) the Course Content folder, (2) the Week 2 Materials folder, and (3) the SmartBook Chapter 1 assignment. I recommend buying this directly from the publisher rather than from the University bookstore.

HOW THIS CLASS IS GOING TO WORK

The class is divided into four units:

- Unit 1 — Intro/Basics (Chapters 1–3)
- Unit 2 — Defamation (Chapters 4–6)
- Unit 3 — Privacy & Access (Chapters 7–10)
- Unit 4 — Trial Publicity, Obscenity & Intellectual Property (Chapters 11–14)

Within each unit, we'll spend about two class sessions on each chapter (there are exceptions — some chapters may get more or less time depending on complexity).

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

A note on how Scenarios and Case Studies are graded: for a class this data-rich in an area where you have little prior experience, I think a student who turns in an assignment (a) on time, (b) in their own words, and (c) following the instructions has earned a passing grade on it. So for Scenarios, every submission starts from a baseline score — 60 or 70 points, depending on the assignment — just for meeting those three conditions. Additional points on top of that baseline are earned through the quality of your legal analysis. The baseline and the additional points available for each Scenario are listed on its assignment sheet. Case Studies, by contrast, are graded on a straight point total — they're less about researching and applying a legal principle and more about reading comprehension, so there's no separate baseline.

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
- 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 the chapter
- Late submissions accepted for up to one week after the due date, with a 5% penalty per day

Each Scenario presents a short hypothetical fact pattern built around that chapter's legal doctrine — for example, a defamation scenario describing a news article, a lawsuit, and the facts in dispute. You'll

typically be asked to (1) identify the legal elements or test that governs the situation, and then (2) apply each of those elements to the facts to reach a reasoned conclusion about how the case would likely come out. This is not a request to summarize the reading — it's a request to use it.

The Chapter 9 exception: instead of a narrative scenario, the Chapter 9 assignment gives you a series of short, sentence-fragment situations, and you decide whether each one involves an “agency record” for FOIA purposes.

Format: submit as an attached Word document or PDF. You may use Grammarly for Education to help with writing mechanics, but not as a substitute for doing your own legal analysis.

Grading: each Scenario starts from a baseline score — 60 or 70 points, depending on the assignment — awarded for submitting on time, in your own words, and following the instructions. Additional points on top of that baseline (30 or 40, depending on the assignment) are earned through the quality of your legal analysis: correctly identifying the applicable legal elements and correctly applying them to the facts. The baseline and the additional points available are listed on each assignment sheet.

Case Studies

- 20% of total grade
- Four over the course of the semester, one at the end of each unit
- Completed entirely in class, on the date specified in the course calendar — the Case Study is the only thing we do that day
- Closed note and handwritten

Case Studies are longer and more involved than Scenarios. Each one presents a detailed, multi-part fact pattern — often several paragraphs, sometimes including a policy or document to interpret — followed by a set of “Targeted Questions” organized by topic. Because Case Studies land at the end of a unit, they typically ask you to draw on more than one chapter at once, synthesizing material rather than applying a single rule in isolation.

Format: Case Studies are completed by hand, during class, closed note — no textbook, notes, or outside material. Plan to be there for the entire session; nothing else is covered that day.

Missed Case Studies: if you have an excused absence on a Case Study day, we'll arrange a makeup. An unexcused absence on a Case Study day earns a zero for that Case Study.

Grading: unlike Scenarios, Case Studies are graded on a straight point total rather than a baseline-plus-analysis split — they're testing careful reading and synthesis across chapters more than the discovery of a single legal rule. The point total for each Case Study is listed on its assignment sheet.

Quizzes

- 20% of total grade
- 4 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 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). Case Studies are handwritten in class, so Grammarly does not apply to them.

On AI use: any other use of generative AI is prohibited. If you turn in an assignment that I suspect has been substantially written by AI, then I will give you a zero for that assignment until either (a) we

discuss your work to my satisfaction or (b) you rewrite it, yourself, and I will assess a slight penalty when I grade it.

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.

GRADE	SCORE
A	90–100
B	80–89
C	70–79
D	60–69
F	Below 60

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 9:30 AM every Tuesday and Thursday. If you arrive after attendance has been recorded, then you will be counted late for that class session.

Accumulated Lates

Three lates equals one unexcused absence. I can tell you from experience that 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.

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

University Email Policy and Course Communications

All correspondence between professors and students must occur via university email accounts. You must have your Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at helpdesk@tamusa.edu or at 210-784-HELP (4357). If you don't hear back within 48 hours, contact them again. They have many requests during the first part of the semester, so you may need to follow up with them.

Academic Accommodations for Individuals 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, Disability Support Services is in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us at the Disability Support Services website, or email us at 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 academic accommodations with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center

All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. 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, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202. Online tutoring is also available for after hours and weekend assistance.

While tutoring hours may change based on tutor schedules and availability, the current tutoring hours in the ALC are as follows:

Day	Appointments available	Walk-in Tutoring — No appointment needed
MONDAY	8 am–6 pm	9 am–5 pm
TUESDAY	8 am–6 pm	9 am–5 pm
WEDNESDAY	8 am–6 pm	9 am–5 pm
THURSDAY	8 am–6 pm	9 am–5 pm
FRIDAY	8 am–5 pm	11 am–4 pm

Counseling/Mental Health Resources

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and 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, visit our website, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

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 24/7/365 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 or through the TELUS Student Support App, which also provides an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.

Emergency Preparedness

JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification system. 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 the JagE Alert website. More information about the Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan is available from the university. Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) 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 by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date 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.

Jaguar Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center (WLDCC)

The WLDCC provides writing support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Writing 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. The WLDCC offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the WLDCC in JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The WLDCC can also be reached by emailing wldcc@tamusa.edu.

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 submit a CARE report for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources. A food pantry is available on campus — contact the General's Store for hours and contact information.

Military Affairs

Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or contact the Office of Military Affairs at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210) 784-1397.

Religious Observances

Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the wide variety 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 course 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, equal opportunity, and human dignity. 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, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu.

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 discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. 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's Title IX Coordinator (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, to take a leave of absence, limit their studies, change their program, or otherwise stop participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable accommodations to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (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. Young Jaguars can support parenting students with daycare if students meet this criteria: (1) must be enrolled in classes at Texas A&M-San Antonio in the current semester, (2) must be Pell eligible or a single parent, (3) child(ren) must be aged 3 to 12-years-old, and (4) child(ren) must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. Hours of operation are Monday–Thursday, 3:30–9:00 PM. For more information, contact Young Jaguars at youngjaguars@tamusa.edu or call (210) 784-2636.

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.

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, and pregnancy/parenting 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 and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with 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 a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures, review the Student Code of Conduct or visit the OSRR website.

Use of Generative AI

This course's generative AI policy is described under Grading, above.

IMPORTANT FALL 2026 DATES

DATE	EVENT
August 20	Tuition & Fee Payments deadline
August 24	First day of class
September 7	Labor Day Holiday — No Classes / University Closed
September 9	Census Date

DATE	EVENT
October 5–October 16	Midterm grading period
November 13	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
November 25	Study Day — No classes
November 26–November 28	Thanksgiving Holiday — No Classes / University Closed
November 30	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
December 4	Last day of classes
December 5–December 11	Final exams
December 15	Commencement

The complete academic calendar is available online at tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar.

COURSE CALENDAR

Readings and assignments are due before the class session listed. Response format, grading, and full instructions for each Scenario are posted to Blackboard. Case Studies are completed in class — see Grading, above.

WEEK	DATE	IN-CLASS ACTIVITY	WORK DUE
1	8/25 & 27	T: Go over syllabus Th: Chapter 1 — The American Legal System	—
2	9/1 & 3	T: Chapter 1, continued Th: Chapter 2 — The First Amendment: The Meaning of Freedom	9/3 — Chapter 1 SmartBook due
3	9/8 & 10	T: Chapter 2, continued Th: Chapter 3 — The First Amendment: Contemporary Problems	9/10 — Chapter 2 SmartBook due
4	9/15 & 17	Chapter 3, continued Th: Case Study 1	9/17 — Chapter 3 SmartBook due 9/17 — Chapter 3 Scenario due 9/21 — Quiz 1 due
5	9/22 & 24	Chapter 4 — Defamation: Establishing a Case	9/26 — Chapter 4 SmartBook due 9/26 — Chapter 4 Scenario due
6	9/29 & 10/1	Chapter 5 — Defamation: Proof of Fault	10/3 — Chapter 5 SmartBook due 10/3 — Chapter 5 Scenario due
7	10/6 & 8	Chapter 6 — Defamation: Defenses and Damages	10/10 — Chapter 6 SmartBook due 10/10 — Chapter 6 Scenario due
8	10/13 & 15	T: Case Study 2 — no new content this session Th: Chapter 7 — Invasion of Privacy: Appropriation and Intrusion	10/14 — Quiz 2 due
9	10/20 & 22	T: Chapter 7, continued Th: Chapter 8 — Invasion of Privacy: Private Facts	10/22 — Chapter 7 SmartBook due 10/22 — Chapter 7 Scenario due

WEEK	DATE	IN-CLASS ACTIVITY	WORK DUE
			10/24 — Chapter 8 SmartBook due 10/24 — Chapter 8 Scenario due
10	10/27 & 10/29	Chapter 9 — Gathering Information: People, Places, Records, and Recordings	10/31 — Chapter 9 SmartBook due 10/31 — Chapter 9 Scenario due
11	11/3 & 11/5	Chapter 10 — Protection of News Sources/Contempt Power	11/7 — Chapter 10 SmartBook due 11/7 — Chapter 10 Scenario due
12	11/10 & 12	T: Case Study 3 — no new content this session Th: Chapter 11 — Free Press—Fair Trial: Trial-Level Remedies and Restrictive Orders	11/11 — Quiz 3 due 11/14 — Chapter 11 SmartBook due
13	11/17 & 19	T: Chapter 12 — Free Press—Fair Trial: Closed Judicial Proceedings Th: Chapter 14 — Copyright and Trademark	11/19 — Chapter 12 SmartBook due
14	11/24 & 26	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING WEEK	
15	12/1 & 3	T: Chapter 14, continued Th: Case Study 4 — no new content this session	12/3 — Chapter 14 SmartBook due 12/4 — Quiz 4 due

Note: Chapters 1–2 do not have Scenario assignments (Scenarios begin with Chapter 3). Chapter 8 covers Private Facts only (not False Light). Chapters 8, 11, and 12 each receive a single class session; all other content chapters receive two. Each Case Study occupies its entire class session.